

The background of the book cover is a stained glass design. At the top, a black rectangular panel contains the title and editor's name. Below this panel is a large, detailed stained glass illustration. It depicts a woman in a red and gold robe, likely a queen or noblewoman, looking down at a young girl. The girl is seated and writing in a large open book with a quill. The book has text written in a medieval script. The entire scene is framed by ornate stained glass tracery in shades of gold, brown, and blue.

WOMEN AND  
LITERATURE  
IN BRITAIN  
1150–1500



*Edited by*  
Carol M. Meale

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## Women and literature in Britain, 1150–1500

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Women and literature in Britain,  
1150–1500

*edited by*

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## Abbreviations

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|      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ANTS | Anglo-Norman Text Society.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| EETS | Early English Text Society: ES, Extra Series; OS, Original Series; SS, Supplementary Series                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| HMSO | Her Majesty's Stationery Office                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| MLN  | <i>Modern Language Notes</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| MLR  | <i>Modern Language Review</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| PL   | J. P. Migne (ed.), <i>Patrologia Latina Cursus Completus</i> (Paris, various years)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| PMLA | <i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| PRO  | Public Record Office                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| RLR  | <i>Revue des Langues Romanes</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| RSTC | A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, <i>A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland . . . 1475-1640</i> , vols. I and II revised by W. F. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson and K. Pantzer (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1986, 1976), vol. III by K. Pantzer, with a chronological index by Philip R. Rider (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1991) |
| SATF | Société des Anciens Textes Français                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| SPCK | Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| STS  | Scottish Text Society                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| VCH  | Victoria County History                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

## Chronology: women and literature in Britain, 1150–1500

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The principal authors and texts discussed in this volume are listed here, including, amongst the latter, those which were either written by women, or which were composed for, or are known to have circulated amongst, a female audience. Where the patron of a given work is known, brief details are supplied. Many of the dates are, inevitably, approximate, given the imprecision of material evidence – such as palaeography and language – upon which scholars have to base their judgements. Further information may be found in the editions of individual texts cited in the footnotes to each chapter. The references to women writing in Wales extend beyond the ostensible chronology of the book, due to the different social and historical circumstances operative on women poets in this country, as described by Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan in her essay. Additional contextualization is provided by a select chronology of historical events: all the women mentioned in this listing are known to have been patrons and/or readers of literature in its broadest sense. References to dates of religious foundations are all to female houses, and are limited to those which receive particular attention in the volume. Given the linguistic range of the texts covered by the contributors the language of each is indicated by the following abbreviations: AN = Anglo-Norman; AS = Anglo-Saxon; L = Latin; ME = Middle English; MS = Middle Scots; OF = Old French; W = Welsh.

|              | Event                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 7666         | Foundation of Barking Abbey (Benedictine) by St Erkenwald, bishop of London (675–93).                                                 |
| c.888        | Foundation of Benedictine abbey of Shaftesbury by King Alfred.                                                                        |
| late 10th c. |                                                                                                                                       |
| c.1010       | Benedictine abbey of Chatteris (Cambs.) founded.                                                                                      |
| 1042         | Accession of Edward the Confessor.                                                                                                    |
| 1045         | Marriage of King Edward to Edith, sister of Harold Godwinson.                                                                         |
| 1066         | Death of Edward the Confessor; Harold Godwinson king 6 Jan.–14 Oct. 1066; Battle of Hastings; accession of William, duke of Normandy. |
| 1065–67      |                                                                                                                                       |
| c.1082/3     |                                                                                                                                       |
| 1087         | Death of William I; accession of William II (William Rufus).                                                                          |
| 1096         | First Crusade.                                                                                                                        |
| 1099         | Capture of Jerusalem.                                                                                                                 |

## Text

Compilation of ‘The Exeter Book’, Exeter Cathedral Chapter Library MS 3501, an anthology containing the only surviving copies of the AS poems *The Wife’s Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*.

*Vita Aedwardi* (L), by a Flemish monk [dedicated to and probably commissioned by Edith, queen of Edward the Confessor].

Goscelin of St Bertin, *Liber confortatorius* (L) [written for the recluse, Eve of Angers, one-time nun of Wilton].

1100            Death of William II; accession of Henry I; marriage  
of Henry to Maud, or Matilda, of Scotland.

1100–18

*Life of St Margaret of Scotland* (1046–93) (L) [written for  
her daughter, Maud, or Matilda, 1st queen of Henry  
I].

early 12th c.

Benedeit (?Benedictine monk), *The Voyage of St Brendan*  
(AN) [1 MS claims it was written for Queen Matilda;  
3 MSS claim Adeliza of Louvain as patron].

1121            Henry I married Adeliza of Louvain.

*fl.* 1121–39

Philippe de Thaon, *Li Cumpoꝝ*; the *Bestiare*, etc. [latter  
dedicated to Adeliza of Louvain].

?c.1125

*La Chançon de Saint Alexis* (AN) [copied into a psalter  
probably made for Christina of Markyate  
(c.1097–c.1161) at St Albans Abbey; MS now at  
Hildesheim, Germany].

1128            Arrival of Cistercian monks in England (Waverley,  
Surrey).

before 1132    Foundation of Benedictine priory of Stratford-at-Bow,  
Middlesex.

1135            Death of Henry I; latter's nephew, Stephen, crowned.

1135–40

Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis* (AN) [written for  
Constance (?de Venoiz), wife of Ralf Fitzgilbert].

1141            King Stephen deposed in April; Empress Matilda in  
power; Stephen re-crowned December.

c.1143–53    Cistercian priory of Swine (Yorks.) founded by ?a  
brother of Robert de Verli.

|              | Event                                                                                                                 | Text                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1147-48      | Second Crusade.                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                          |
| c.1150-58    | Foundation of Cluniac priory at Arthington (Yorks.) by Peter de Arthington.                                           |                                                                                                                                                                          |
| c.1155-57    | Re-siting of Benedictine priory (founded c.1147 by Robert, earl of Leicester and wife, Amicia), at Nuneaton (Warks.). |                                                                                                                                                                          |
| before 1149  | Cistercian priory of Cotham (Lincs.) founded by Alan de Monceaux and wife, Matilda.                                   |                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 1152         | Marriage of Henry, nephew of Henry I, to Eleanor of Aquitaine (b.?1122).                                              |                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 1154         | Accession of Henry Fitzempress (Henry II).                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                          |
| before 1155  | Cistercian priory of Sinningthwaite (Yorks.) founded by Bertram Haget.                                                |                                                                                                                                                                          |
| ?mid-12th c. |                                                                                                                       | Bérout, <i>Tristan</i> (AN).                                                                                                                                             |
| 1155         |                                                                                                                       | Wace, <i>Brut</i> (OF) [Laȝamon (see below) claims that this was presented to Eleanor of Aquitaine, but there is no substantiating evidence for the assertion].          |
| after 1155   |                                                                                                                       | Thomas, <i>Tristan</i> (AN).                                                                                                                                             |
| ?c.1155-65   |                                                                                                                       | an anonymous monk of St Albans, <i>The Life of Christina of Markyate</i> (L) [likely to have been written at the instance of Robert Gorham, abbot of St Albans 1151-66]. |
| ?c.1150-75   |                                                                                                                       | anon., <i>Boeve de Haumtone</i> (AN) [possible patrons the second and third Albini earls of Arundel].                                                                    |

?1160–62

Ailred of Rievaulx (1100–1167), *De Institutione Inclusarum* (L), written for his sister and other female recluses].

1162 Thomas Becket created archbishop of Canterbury.

1163

Ailred of Rievaulx, *Vita* of Edward the Confessor (L) [source for the AN *Lives* of the saint by the nun of Barking and Matthew Paris].

1163–89

a nun of Barking (?Clemence), *La Vie d'Edouard le Confesseur* (AN).

1168 Separation of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine (she d. 1204).

1168–78

Etienne de Fougères, *Le Livre des manières* (AN) [written for Cicely (Fitz)John, countess of Hereford: she still living 1204/5].

1170 Martyrdom of Thomas Becket, 29 Dec. (canonization 1173; translation 20 July 1220).

c.1170

Thomas, *The Romance of Horn* (AN).

1174–91

Hue de Rotelande, *Ipomedon* (AN); *Protheselaus* (AN) [latter written for Gilbert Fitzbaderon, lord of Monmouth (1176/7–1190/91)].

?c.1170–1200

Marie de France, *Lais* [dedicated to a king, (perhaps Henry II or his son the 'Young King', crowned 1170)]; *Fables* [commissioned by a Count William]; and the *Espurgatoire saint Patriz* (OF).

c.1175–1200

anon., *La Folie Tristan d'Oxford* (AN).

before 1184 Refoundation of house of canons as Benedictine abbey at Esholt (Yorks.).

|                           | Event                                                                                                                                          | Text                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>fl.</i> c.1180–1200    |                                                                                                                                                | Gwenllïan ferch Rhirid Flaidd (her father, a poet, <i>fl.</i> c.1160); one poem attributed to her (W).                                  |
| 1183–89                   |                                                                                                                                                | Beneit, a monk of St Albans, <i>La Vie de Saint Thomas le Martyr</i> (AN) [written for a gentry husband and wife].                      |
| 1186                      | Refoundation of Benedictine abbey of Amesbury (Wilts.) by Henry II (nuns installed in 1186).                                                   |                                                                                                                                         |
| 1189                      | Death of Henry II; accession of Richard I (Coeur de Lion), on 3rd Crusade and in captivity in Germany, 1189–94; remained in France until 1199. |                                                                                                                                         |
| late 12th c.<br>(?c.1170) |                                                                                                                                                | anon., <i>La Vie de Saint Laurent</i> (AN) [commissioned by a ‘handmaiden’ of the saint, though whether religious or lay is not known]. |
| late 12th c.              |                                                                                                                                                | Clemence, a nun of Barking, <i>La Vie de Seinte Catherine</i> (AN).                                                                     |
|                           |                                                                                                                                                | Guernes de Pont-Ste-Maxence, <i>La Vie de Saint Thomas Becket</i> (OF).                                                                 |
|                           |                                                                                                                                                | anon., <i>Le Donnei des Amants</i> (AN).                                                                                                |
|                           |                                                                                                                                                | anon., <i>Amis e Amilun</i> (AN).                                                                                                       |
| c.1195                    | Austin priory of Campsey Ash, Suffolk, founded by Theobald de Valognes II.                                                                     |                                                                                                                                         |
| 1190–1220                 |                                                                                                                                                | anon., <i>Lai d'Haveloc</i> (OF).<br>anon., <i>Amadas et Ydoine</i> (OF).                                                               |



c.1190–1230

1199                      Death of Richard I; accession of brother, John.  
early 13th c.

1215                      Magna Carta; Fourth Lateran Council summoned by  
Pope Innocent III: amongst the provisions was one  
laying down the necessity for priests to hear  
confession from their parishioners at least once a  
year.

1216                      Death of King John; accession of son as Henry III.  
(after 1215)

1221                      Establishment of the Dominican order of friars.

1224                      Establishment of Franciscan order.

c.1225

anon.: the 'Wooing Group': four lyrical meditations  
comprising *Lofsong of ure Louerde*, *Ureisun of God  
Almihit*, *On Ureisun of ure Louerde*, *Wohunge of ure Lauerd*  
(ME).

anon.: the 'Katherine Group': *Seinte Katerine*, *Seinte  
Margarete*, *Seinte Iulienne*, *Hali Meidhad*, *Sawles Warde*  
(ME).

[all these texts would have been appropriate for an  
audience of female recluses, or women religious,  
though there are signs that more general audiences  
were envisaged for the saints' lives, at least].

Lazamon, *Brut* (ME).

Guillaume le Clerc, *Fergus* (OF) [attribution of  
patronage to Alan of Galloway now generally  
discounted].

anon., *Ancrene Wisse* (ME) [composed originally for  
three anchorite sisters of 'gentile' birth].

anon., *King Horn* (ME).

| Event                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Text                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1232 Foundation of Lacock abbey (Austin) by Ela, countess of Salisbury [fragments of a Life of the foundress by a successor as abbess, ?Beatrice of Kent (d. ?c.1280), survive from later in the 13th c. (?L)]. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1232-42                                                                                                                                                                                                         | anon., <i>Gui de Warewic</i> (AN).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 1236 Marriage of Henry III to Eleanor of Provence.                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| c.1240 Establishment of Carmelite order of friars.                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1248 Establishment of Augustinian order of friars.<br>Austin abbey founded at Canonsleigh (Devon) by Maud de Clare, countess of Gloucester and Hereford.                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| ?mid-13th c.                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Marie (?a nun of Chatteris), <i>La Vie Sainte Andrée</i> (AN).<br>Matthew Paris (from 1217 a Benedictine monk of St Albans, d.1259), <i>La Vie de Saint Edmond, archevêque de Cantorbery</i> (AN) [dedicated to Isabella (de Warenne) countess of Arundel (d. before Nov.1282)].<br>Matthew Paris, <i>La Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei</i> (AN) [dedicated to Eleanor of Provence].<br>Robert Grosseteste, bishop of Lincoln (1235-53), <i>Château d'amour</i> (AN) [perhaps originally written for noble youths, such as Simon de Montfort's sons, who were being brought up in his household; later read by nuns; several translations into ME].<br>anon., <i>Floris and Blancheflur</i> (ME). |
| 1254 Marriage of Edward, son of Henry III and Eleanor of Provence, to Eleanor of Castile.                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

1250s–60s

Walter of Bibbesworth, a knight from Essex, composed his *Traité...sur le langue française* for ‘ma dame Dyonise de Mountechensi’ (probably the wife and widow [after 1255] of Warin de Montchesny), to enable her to teach her children the vocabulary of ‘husbandry and management’ for use in later life (AN and ME).

c.1260

Jacobus de Voragine (1328/30–98) (Dominican), *Legenda Sanctorum* (L), more usually known as *Legenda Aurea*.

1262–70

Ralph Bocking (Dominican), *Vita* of Richard, bishop of Chichester, to whom he was confessor (L) [it is argued that this, not the AN derivative, was made for Isabel, countess of Arundel].

c.1265

London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 209 (the ‘Lambeth Apocalypse’) made for Eleanor (de Ferrers) de Quincy, countess of Winchester (d.1274) [prior to her re-marriage in 1267] (L and AN).

1272

Death of Henry III; accession of Edward I.

?1250–1300

anon., *Of Arthour and of Merlin* (ME).

before 1272

Thomas Hales, Franciscan: *Love Ron* [written for a female ?recluse].

1272–90

Girart d’Amiens, *Escanor* (OF) [dedicated to Eleanor of Castile, queen of Edward I].

1290

Death of Eleanor of Castile.

1291

Death of Eleanor of Provence, then a nun at Amesbury (Edward I married Margaret of France, 1299).

|               | Event                                                                                                                                |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1290–1483     |                                                                                                                                      |
| 1293/94       | Foundation of Franciscan house of Minoresses, Aldgate, London, by Edmund, earl of Lancaster (brother of Edward I) and wife, Blanche. |
| late 13th c.: |                                                                                                                                      |
| 1295–1310     |                                                                                                                                      |
| 1307          | Death of Edward I; accession of Edward II.                                                                                           |
| early 14th c. |                                                                                                                                      |
| 1303          | Betrothal of Edward, son of Edward I and Eleanor of Castile, to Isabella of France.                                                  |
| 1308          | Marriage of prince Edward to Isabella of France; birth of eldest son, Edward, 1312.                                                  |
| 1327          | Murder of Edward II; accession of son, Edward III.                                                                                   |
| 1328          | Edward III marries Philippa of Hainault (later patron of Froissart).                                                                 |

| Text                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Stonor Letters and Papers</i> (L; AN; ME).                                                                                                                         |
| anon., <i>Amis and Amiloun</i> (ME).                                                                                                                                  |
| anon., <i>Sir Tristrem</i> (ME).                                                                                                                                      |
| Nicole Bozon (Franciscan), <i>Life of St Elizabeth of Hungary</i> (AN).                                                                                               |
| anon., <i>Havelok the Dane</i> (ME).                                                                                                                                  |
| anon., <i>Fouke Fitzwarin</i> (AN) [probably written in its present form for Fulk Fitzwarin V: incorporates elements of an earlier, mid-13th c., ?alliterative poem]. |
| anon., <i>Sir Bevis of Hampton</i> (ME).                                                                                                                              |
| anon., <i>Lay le Freine</i> (ME).                                                                                                                                     |
| anon., <i>Sir Degaré</i> (ME).                                                                                                                                        |
| anon., <i>Sir Isumbras</i> (ME).                                                                                                                                      |

- 1329 John Wycliffe born.  
 1337 Edward III lays claim to the French crown through right of his mother, Isabella (beginnings of the 'Hundred Years War').

?1300–40

anon., *Sir Perceval of Galles* (ME).

- 1342 Foundation of Franciscan abbey at Denny (Cambs.) by Marie (de St Pol) de Valence, countess of Pembroke (foundress of Pembroke College, Cambridge, 1347; she d. at Denny, 1372).

- 1348 Edward III founded the Order of the Garter.

1348–49

Richard Rolle (?1305/10–1349), *Form of Living* (ME), written for 'Margareta de Kyrkby', perhaps a nun at Hampole prior to her life as a recluse at Anderby. Nicholas Watson argues that Rolle's writing career spanned the 1330s–40s, and would place the *Commandment* (ME), possibly also written for Margaret, prior to *Form*; and *Ego Dormio* (ME), (in 1 MS said to have been written for a nun of Yedingham [Yorks.], but perhaps rather for a woman newly entering religious life), earlier still. *The Meditations on the Passion* (ME) cannot be assigned a precise date. See Further reading, IV c ii, no.52.

f.l.mid-14c.  
 mid-14th c

Dafydd ap Gwilym (b.?c.1320), poet (W).

anon., *Sir Eglamour of Artois* (ME).

- 1348 Black Death (plague) arrives in Europe.  
 1352 Death of Isabella of France, mother of Edward III; burial as a Poor Clare at Franciscan church in Newgate, London.

|           | Event                                                                                                          | Text                                                                                                                          |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| c.1350–61 |                                                                                                                | anon., <i>William of Palerne</i> (ME) [ostensibly patronized by Humphrey de Bohun, 6th earl of Hereford and Essex (1308–61)]. |
| 1355      | Foundation of Austin priory at Dartford by Edward III.                                                         |                                                                                                                               |
| 1350–70   |                                                                                                                | anon., <i>The Abbey of the Holy Ghost</i> (ME); trans. from a French source.                                                  |
| 1358–77   |                                                                                                                | Katherine Sutton, abbess of Barking, initiated the re-writing into semi-dramatic form of part of the Easter liturgy.          |
| 1366      | Franciscan abbey of Bruisyard (Suffolk) founded by Edward III at instigation of son, Lionel, duke of Clarence. |                                                                                                                               |
| 1369      | Death of Philippa of Hainault.                                                                                 |                                                                                                                               |
| 1350–1400 |                                                                                                                | anon., <i>Octovian</i> ('northern' version: (ME).<br>Thomas Chestre, <i>Octavian</i> ('southern' version:) (ME).              |
| 1350–70   |                                                                                                                | anon., <i>The Abbey of the Holy Ghost</i> (ME), trans. from a French source.                                                  |
| c.1365–70 |                                                                                                                | William Langland (1325/35–after 1388), <i>Piers Plowman</i> , 'A'-text (ME).                                                  |
| May 1373  | Period of Julian of Norwich's illness, during which she experienced her divine 'Revelation'.                   |                                                                                                                               |

?after 1375

Walter Hilton (1340–96, latterly Augustinian canon of Thurgarton, Notts.), *Scale of Perfection*1, Bk 1 [addressed to a ‘ghostly sister’]; *Epistle on the Mixed Life* [1 MS states it was written for ‘a worldli lord’]; *Scale of Perfection*, Bk 2 (all ME).

mid-to-late  
1370s

Geoffrey Chaucer (early 1340s–1400), *Anelida and Arcite*.

1377

Death of Edward III; accession of his grandson as Richard II.

c.1377

Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ‘B’-text (ME).

1380

Marriage of Henry, earl of Derby, later Henry IV, son of John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster and his 1st wife, Blanche, to Mary Bohun (1369/70–94), sister of Eleanor (1359–99), wife of Henry’s uncle, Thomas of Woodstock, daughters of Humphrey de Bohun, 7th earl of Hereford (1342–73).

1381

Peasants’ Revolt in England.

1382

Marriage of Richard II to Anne of Bohemia.

Dec. 1384

Death of John Wycliffe.

1380s

Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ‘C’-text (ME).

?c.1385

Chaucer, *Complaint of Venus* (ME).

c.1386–

Chaucer, *Legend of Good Women* (ME).

?1385–88

Julian of Norwich (1342–?after 1416), the *Revelation of Love* (ME), ‘Short’ version [re-dating argued by Nicholas Watson, see Further reading, iv c ii, no.53; text dated by previous scholars to c.1373].

|                                   | <b>Event</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Text</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1375–1400<br>late 1380s–<br>?1400 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Thomas Chestre, <i>Lybeaus Desconus</i> (ME).<br>Chaucer, <i>Canterbury Tales</i> (ME).                                                                                                                                              |
| 1394                              | Death of Anne of Bohemia (Richard II married Isabella of France, 1396).                                                                                                                                                                  | anon., <i>Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God</i> (ME) [well-attested female audience including nuns and at least one laywoman, Elizabeth Scrope/Beaumont/de Vere (d.1537)].                                                 |
| 1399                              | Deposition and ?murder, of Richard II, assumption of the throne by his cousin, Henry, earl of Derby, son of John of Gaunt and his 1st wife, Blanche, as Henry IV.                                                                        | anon., <i>Sir Tryamour</i> (ME).                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| ?1375–1425                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | anon., <i>Chevelere Assigne</i> (ME).                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| late 14th c.                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | anon., <i>The Chastising of God's Children</i> (ME) [written for a community of women religious, possibly at Barking, though the case is not proven].<br>First ME trans. of Ailred of Rievaulx's <i>De Institutione Inclusarum</i> . |
| before Nov.<br>1396               | Marriage of Joan Beaufort, daughter of John of Gaunt and his mistress then 3rd wife, Katherine Swynford, to Ralph Neville, 1st earl of Westmoreland. Amongst the children she bore him were Cecily and Anne Neville, on whom, see below. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |



?late 1390s

1399

?1399

?before 1400

c.1400

1402

1404/5

c.1405

1407

c.1408

*Constitutions* of Thomas Arundel, archbishop of Canterbury, which included the forbidding of unlicensed possession of vernacular Bibles.

Christine de Pizan (c.1364–?1430), *Les Proverbes Moraux* (OF) [written for her son, Jean].

Christine de Pizan, *L'Epistre au Dieu d'Amours* (OF).

Christine de Pizan, *L'Epistre d'Othéa la Deesse...à Hector* (OF).

compilation of the Vernon MS (Oxford, Bodleian Library Eng.poet A.1) [probably intended for a female community, lay or enclosed].

anon., *Emaré* (ME).

anon., *Sir Gowther* (ME).

anon., *Sir Torrent of Portyngale* (ME).

*The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ME trans. by an unknown Carthusian monk, of Marguerite Porete, *Le Mirouer des Simples Ames* (1296–1306) [Porete, a Flemish Beguine, was burnt for heresy, Paris, 1310].

Thomas Hoccleve (1366/67–1426), trans., *The Letter of Cupid*, by Christine de Pizan.

Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* (OF).

Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre des Trois Vertus* (*The Treasure of the City of Ladies*) (OF).

Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre du Corps de Policie* (OF).

Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre des Fais d'Armes et de Chevalerie* (OF).

|               | Event                                    | Text                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1410          |                                          | John Walton, ME verse translation of Boethius's <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i> [made for Elizabeth Berkeley ((?1386–1422), 1st wife of Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick (1381/2–1439)].                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| c.1410        |                                          | authorization by Thomas Arundel, archbishop of Canterbury, of the Carthusian Nicholas Love's translation of the pseudo-Bonaventuran <i>Meditationes Vita Christi</i> , <i>The Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ</i> ].                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| ?1410–15      |                                          | Julian of Norwich, <i>Revelation of Love</i> (ME), 'Long' version [re-dating argued by Watson, see Further reading, iv c ii, no.53: previously dated c.1393].                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 1400–1425     |                                          | anon., <i>The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Watbelyne</i> (ME).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| early-15th c. |                                          | anon., trans. of <i>The Revelations of Saint Elizabeth</i> (ME) [once thought to be Elizabeth of Schönau, 12th c. German Benedictine mystic: other candidates are Elizabeth of Hungary (d.1231) and Elizabeth of Toess (c.1294–1336): see Barratt, cited in Further reading, iv b, p.71 and iv c ii, no.2].<br>anon., <i>The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter</i> (ME) [in circulation in different forms from the mid-14th- to the late 15th c.]. |
| 1412–20       |                                          | John Lydgate (c.1370–?1449, Benedictine monk of Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk), <i>Troy Book</i> (ME) [commissioned by Henry V whilst prince of Wales].                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 1413          | Death of Henry IV; accession of Henry V. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

|               |                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1413–14       | Lollard uprising, in which Sir John Oldcastle implicated.                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| ?1413–15      | Margery Kempe visits Julian of Norwich at the latter's cell.                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1414          | Foundation of Bridgettine house at Syon by Henry V.                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| early-15th c. |                                                                                                                                                                                     | Trans. of <i>Il Dialogo</i> by Catherine of Siena (1347–80) as <i>The Orchard of Syon</i> [made for the Bridgettine nuns there by an unknown cleric].                                              |
| May 1415      | Birth of Cecily Neville, 10th child of Joan (Beaufort), countess of Westmoreland; she married before 1424 Richard Neville, later duke of York: mother of Edward IV and Richard III. |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 25 Oct. 1415  | English victory at Agincourt.                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1415–26       |                                                                                                                                                                                     | Lydgate, <i>Legend of St Margaret</i> (ME) [for Anne Stafford (d.1432), wife or widow of Edmund Mortimer, 5th earl of March, after whose death in 1425 she married John, duke of Exeter (d.1447)]. |
| 1417          | Execution of Sir John Oldcastle.                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 21 May 1420   | Treaty of Troyes between England and France; Henry claims title of heir and regent of France.                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 2 June 1420   | Marriage of Henry V and Catherine of Valois.                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1421          |                                                                                                                                                                                     | Lydgate, <i>Siege of Thebes</i> (ME).                                                                                                                                                              |
| 1421–22       |                                                                                                                                                                                     | Hoccleve dedicates a holograph MS of his <i>Series</i> , Durham University Library Cosin MS v.iii.9, to Joan, countess of Westmoreland (ME).                                                       |

| Event                                                                                                                                                                                               | Text                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ?1421–22                                                                                                                                                                                            | Lydgate, <i>Life of Our Lady</i> (ME) [1 MS states compilation undertaken at the ‘excitacion and styrring’ of Henry V].                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 31 Aug. 1422    Death of Henry V; accession of Henry VI; his uncle, John, duke of Bedford, appointed regent of France until his death in 1435.                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 1422                                                                                                                                                                                                | ‘a Reuelacyone schewed to ane holy womane now one late tyme’ (ME) [visions of purgatory granted to a recluse named Margaret, dictated to a priest].                                                                                                                                                                 |
| ?1420s                                                                                                                                                                                              | Dame Eleanor Hull (c.1394–1460), trans. from French of the <i>Seven Penitential Psalms</i> (ME).<br>Lydgate, <i>Invocation to St Anne</i> (ME) [for Anne, daughter of Eleanor Bohun and Thomas of Woodstock, 1st countess of Stafford (d.1438), mother of commissioner of Lydgate’s <i>Legend of St Margareþ</i> ]. |
| ?after 1423                                                                                                                                                                                         | Lydgate, <i>Fifteen Joys of Our Lady</i> (ME) [composed for Isabella, lady Despenser (1400–39), 2nd wife of Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, perhaps shortly after this marriage: a MS note describes her as ‘nowe Countasse of Warr’].                                                                          |
| 1425–1520                                                                                                                                                                                           | <i>Paston Letters and Papers</i> (ME).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| ?late 1420s    Secret marriage between Catherine of Valois, widow of Henry V, and Owain Tudur: their son, Edmund, was father of Henry VII. Catherine d. at Bermondsey Abbey (Cluniac), 3 Jan. 1437. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

1428–31      Heresy trials in the diocese of Norwich (several women tried, including Margery Baxter of Martham and Hawisia Mone of Loddon).

?1422–61

anon., first ME translation of *Le Livre de la Chevalier de la Tour Landry* (1372).

?1430–48

Lydgate, *Virtues of the Mass* (ME) [written at the command of Alice Chaucer (c.1404–75), granddaughter of the poet, as countess of Suffolk: she became duchess in 1448].

1431      Henry VI crowned at Paris.

after 1433

–?1442

Lydgate, *Guy of Warwick* (ME) [written for Margaret (Beauchamp) (1404–1467), 2nd wife of John Talbot, 1st earl of Shrewsbury (d.1453); the Prologue, at least, may date from 1442 when Margaret became countess].

1436, 23 July

Revision by a priest of Book I of *The Book of Margery Kempe* (c.1393–after 1439); the transcription of Book II begun 28 April 1438.

30 Dec. 1439      Death of Margaret (Holand), widowed duchess of Clarence, commissioner of the ‘Clarence Hours’ and patroness of spiritual writings [see Further reading, iv c ii, no.29].

31 May 1443      Birth of Lady Margaret Beaufort, daughter of John Beaufort, duke of Somerset (d.1444) and Margaret Beauchamp of Bletsoe (d. 1472).

## Event

1443-47

18 April 1445 Marriage of Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou.

?1440s

## Text

Osbern Bokenham (1393-after 1463, Augustinian friar of Clare, Suffolk), compilation of *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* (ME) [legend of St Anne dedicated to Katherine Denston; St Dorothy: request for prayers for John and Isabel Hunt; Mary Magdalen: patron Isabel Bourchier, countess of Eu; St Katherine dedicated to Katherine Howard and Katherine Denston; St Agatha: request for prayers for Agatha Flegge; St Elizabeth written for Elizabeth de Vere, countess of Oxford. The whole collection assembled for a friar, Thomas Burgh, for presentation to a 'holy place of nunnys' – perhaps the Franciscans at Aldgate or Denny].

*The Epistle of Othea*, trans. by Stephen Scrope (c.1396-1472) of Christine de Pizan's text [originally dedicated to Humphrey Stafford, duke of Buckingham (cr.1444); later re-dedicated to a 'hye princesse', perhaps Humphrey's wife, Anne (Neville), or his daughter, Anne Stafford/de Vere/Cobham (d.1472)].

Beginning of compilation of the Findern MS (Cambridge University Library Ff.1.6) apparently for the use of women, some of whom may have been copyists, and containing four poems which have been attributed to women writers.

?1447–56

*A Holy Salutation to the Virgin* (ME), copied by John Shirley (d.1456), and attributed by him to an ‘ anchoress of Maunssfeld ’ in Oxford, Bodleian Library Ashmole MS 59.

before 1451

John Capgrave (?1393–1464; Augustinian friar of Lynn, Norfolk), *Life of St Augustine* (ME) [for a ‘gentill woman’].

c.1450

anon., second ME trans. of Ailred of Rievaulx’s *De Institutione Inclusarum*.

anon., *Generydes* (stanzaic version: ME)

anon., *The Assembly of Ladies* (ME).

anon., *Le Bone Florence of Rome* (ME).

anon., poem on *The Nightingale* (ME) [dedicated to Anne (Neville), countess of Stafford and duchess of Buckingham (d.1480) presumably before her re-marriage to Walter Blount, 1st baron Mountjoy, 1467].

Pt II of New York Public Library Spencer MS 3 (‘Wingfield Hours’), made for Anne (Neville), countess of Stafford and duchess of Buckingham.

anon., *The Book of Ghostly Grace*, ME trans. of Mechtild of Hackeborn’s *Liber Spiritualis Gratiae* (L) written down 1291–98 by Gertrude the Great [earliest MS BL Egerton 2006 (?1260–80) owned by Richard, duke of Gloucester and his wife Anne Neville, daughter of Richard Neville, earl of Warwick].

anon., *The Good Wife Wold a Pilgrimage* (ME) [extant only in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales Porkington MS 10 (actual shelf-mark Brogynton II.1) of c.1470].

|                 | Event                                                                                                                                                         | Text |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 1453            | Effective end of the Hundred Years War, with the English loss of Gascony (battle of Castillon, 17 July).                                                      |      |
| 1455–85         | ‘Wars of the Roses’ between the houses of York and Lancaster.                                                                                                 |      |
| 28 Jan. 1457    | Birth of the future Henry VII to Margaret (Beaufort) Tudor.                                                                                                   |      |
| 4 March 1461    | Assumption of the throne by Edward IV, eldest son of Richard, duke of York and Cecily Neville, daughter of Joan, countess of Westmoreland.                    |      |
| 31 April 1464   | Secret marriage of Edward IV to Elizabeth Wydville, daughter of Sir Richard Wydville and Jaquetta of Luxembourg, 2nd wife and widow of John, duke of Bedford. |      |
| 11 Feb. 1466    | Birth of Elizabeth of York.                                                                                                                                   |      |
| 20 Mar. 1469    | Birth of Cecily of York (d.20 Aug. 1507).                                                                                                                     |      |
| ?               | 1450–1500                                                                                                                                                     |      |
| c.1460–80       |                                                                                                                                                               |      |
| f.l.c.1460–1500 |                                                                                                                                                               |      |
| 1460–1551/2     |                                                                                                                                                               |      |
| March           |                                                                                                                                                               |      |
| 1469–70         |                                                                                                                                                               |      |

Trans. by Anthony Babington of Christine de Pizan’s *Epistre d’Othéa*.  
anon., *The Thewis of Gud Women* (MS).  
anon., *The Flower and the Leaf* (ME)  
Gwerful Mechain (daughter of poet Hywel Fychan of Mechain, Powys); 38 poems (W) attributed to her.  
*Plumpton Correspondence* (ME).  
Sir Thomas Malory completed his *Arthuriad*.



Oct.1470–  
March/May  
1471

Readeption of Henry VI, and his subsequent  
murder, 21 May.

c.1470

Christine de Pizan's *Livre de Corps de Policie* trans. into  
ME [?by Anthony Wydville, 2nd earl Rivers (exec.  
1483), brother of Queen Elizabeth].

early 1472

Marriage of Richard, duke of Gloucester (younger  
brother of Edward IV) to Anne Neville (b.11 June  
1456, d. 15 March 1485), daughter of Richard Neville,  
earl of Warwick and Anne Beauchamp (1426–92),  
herself the daughter of Richard Beauchamp, earl of  
Warwick and Isabella Despenser.

Feb., 1477

Valentine poem from Margery Brews (d.1495) to her  
future husband, John Paston III (ME).

1472–88

*Cely Letters* (ME).

20 Feb. 1478

*Moral Proverbs* of Christine de Pizan, trans. by Anthony  
Wydville, printed by William Caxton.

25 Aug. 1482

Death of Margaret of Anjou in penury, in France.

9 April 1483

Death of Edward IV, followed by brief reign of his  
eldest son, Edward V.

6 July 1483

Coronation of Richard III.

20 Nov. 1483

*The Golden Legand* printed by Caxton from his own  
trans. of Jacobus de Voragine.

31 Jan. 1484

*The Book of the Knight of the Tower* printed by Caxton:  
his trans. undertaken at the request of a 'noble lady',  
mother of many daughters – perhaps Elizabeth  
Wydville, 7 of whose 10 children by Edward IV were  
daughters.

|         | Event                                             |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------|
| ?       | mid-1480s                                         |
| 31 July | 1485                                              |
| 22 Aug. | 1485 Battle of Bosworth; accession of Henry VII.  |
| 18 Jan. | 1486 Marriage of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York. |
| 1486    |                                                   |
| 14 July | 1489                                              |
| 1490    |                                                   |
| 1491    |                                                   |

## Text

Production of *The Beauchamp Pageants* (London BL Cotton Julius MS E.IV, art.6), captioned illustrations of the life of Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, possibly at the behest of his daughter, Anne (Beauchamp) Neville, countess of Warwick (d.1492).

Caxton pub. his edition of Malory as the *Morte D'Arthur*.

?Dame Julyans Barnes, *Tristram* (ME) [probably composed in the earlier 15th c.], a compilation of hunting material drawn directly or indirectly from *L'Art de Venerie* by William Twiti (c.1327) and Gaston de Foix's *Livre de la Chasse* (both translated into ME) pub. in *The Boke of St Albans* by the Schoolmaster Printer of St Albans; repr. by Wynkyn de Worde, 1496. The identification and sex of the author is uncertain.

Christine de Pizan, *Faytes of Arms* trans. at request of Henry VII and printed by Caxton.

*Blanchardin and Eglantine* printed by Caxton [trans. into ME from French undertaken at the request of Margaret Beaufort].

*Fifteen Oes* (prayers in ME) printed by Caxton at the 'commaundementes' of Elizabeth of York and Margaret Beaufort.

8 June 1492      Death of Elizabeth Wydville at Bermondsey Abbey.  
?1492

anon., *The Reuelacions of Saynt Elysabeth the Kynges  
Daughter of Hungarye* (ME) printed by Wynkyn de  
Worde; repr. ?1500 [on problems of attribution of  
authorship see Barratt, Further reading, iv c ii, no.2].

1494

Hilton, *Scale of Perfection*, printed by de Worde at the  
command of Margaret Beaufort.

1495              Death of Cecily Neville, duchess of York.  
?late 15th c.

*Lamentation of Mary Magdalen* [possibly composed by a  
woman: printed by Wynkyn de Worde, c.1520;  
included in editions of Chaucer's works from 1526  
onwards].

early 1499      Lady Margaret Beaufort took a vow of chastity during  
the lifetime of her 3rd husband, Thomas Stanley  
(d.1504).

c.1500

A ME love lyric in Bodleian Library Rawlinson MS  
c.86 attributed to a 'Quene Elyzabeth' [?Elizabeth  
Wydville, queen of Edward IV; or her daughter.  
Elizabeth of York, queen of Henry VII].

14 Nov. 1501    Marriage of Arthur, eldest son of Henry VII and  
Elizabeth of York, with Catherine of Aragon.  
c.1501

...a shorte treatyse of contemplacyon...taken out of the boke of  
*Margerie kempe of lynn*, printed by de Worde (repr. by  
Henry Pepwell, 1521).

April 1502      Death of prince Arthur.

11 Feb. 1503    Death of Elizabeth of York, a few days after giving  
birth to a short-lived daughter, Catherine.

| Event                                                                  | Text                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1503                                                                   | <i>The Imitation of Christ</i> printed by Richard Pynson: Bks I–III of a French version of Jean Gerson’s original text trans. by William Atkinson; Bk IV by Lady Margaret Beaufort.        |
| ?1506                                                                  | <i>The Mirror of Gold for the Sinful Soul</i> , trans. from a French trans. of the Latin of Jacobus de Gruytrode by Lady Margaret Beaufort, printed by Pynson.                             |
| 16 June 1508                                                           | Collection of sermons by John Fisher, bishop of Rochester, <i>The Fruitful Sayings of David</i> , written with the encouragement of Lady Margaret Beaufort, printed by de Worde.           |
| 21 April 1509    Death of Henry VII; accession of Henry VIII.          | Funeral sermon for Henry VII by John Fisher printed by de Worde at the ‘specyall request’ of Lady Margaret Beaufort.                                                                       |
| 3 June 1509    Marriage of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon.<br>1509 |                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 29 June 1509    Death of Lady Margaret Beaufort.                       | Trans. into ME by Henry Watson of a French version of Sebastian Brant’s <i>Ship of Fools</i> printed by de Worde: trans. made at the ‘entysement & exhortation’ of Lady Margaret Beaufort. |
| 6 July, 1509                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| ?1509                                                                  | <i>Life of St Ursula</i> printed by de Worde; trans. by William Hatfield, monk of Rochester, at the request of Lady Margaret Beaufort.                                                     |
| c.1510                                                                 | Henry Watson, trans. of <i>Valentine and Orson</i> [printed by de Worde].                                                                                                                  |

18 Feb. 1516 Birth of princess Mary to Catherine of Aragon and Henry VIII.

1519

The *Orcherd of Syon* printed by de Worde, 'at the greate coste' of Richard Sutton, steward of Syon.

1521

Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Bryan Anslay, printed by Pepwell, at the 'counsaille' of the earl of Kent.

?1526

*A devout treatise upon the pater noster* printed by Thomas Berthelet: trans. from Erasmus's Latin by Margaret (More) Roper, daughter of Sir Thomas More, it was published anonymously with an introduction by Richard Hyrd and a dedication to More's niece, 'Fraunces S[taverton]'.  
Thomas Berthelet printed by Richard Hyrd's trans. of

?1529

Juan Luis Vives's *De institutione foeminae christianae* (pub. at Antwerp, 1523), a text dedicated to Catherine of Aragon, and intended in part for the instruction of the Princess Mary.

1520S–30S

Compilation of the Devonshire MS (BL Additional 17492) [in part copied by, and containing poems by, several women].

c.25 Jan. 1532 Anne Boleyn, daughter of Thomas Boleyn, earl of Ormonde and Wiltshire and Elizabeth Howard, married to Henry VIII (annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon confirmed at episcopal court at Dunstaple, 23 May, followed on 28 May by statement of legality of Anne and Henry's union).

|                   | <b>Event</b>                                         |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 7 Sept. 1533      | Birth of Princess Elizabeth to Anne Boleyn.          |
| 8 Jan. 1536       | Death of Catherine of Aragon.                        |
| 17 May 1536       | Annulment of Henry VIII's marriage with Anne Boleyn. |
| 19 May 1536       | Execution of Anne Boleyn.                            |
| <i>f</i> .1520–70 |                                                      |
| 1677–1749         |                                                      |
| 18th c.           |                                                      |
| 1766–1805         |                                                      |

## **Text**

Alis of Llannerch, Llewenni Fechan, Denbigh, and her sisters, Catrin and Gwenhwyfar (daughters of poet Gruffydd ab Ieuan ap Llewelyn Fychan [c. 1485–1553]). There is some confusion in establishing authorship of the substantial number of poems attributed to Catrin in 3 MSS, since they are elsewhere ascribed to a contemporary Welsh woman poet, Catrin ferch Gruffydd ap Hywel from Llanddanielfab in Anglesey, who was active at around the same time.

Angharad James of Dolwyddelan, Caernarfonshire, poet (W).

Welsh poets and collectors of poems by their fellow-countrywomen: Margaret Davies, or Marged Dafydd, of Coet-gau Du near Trawsfynydd (c.1700–78/85)

Margaret Rowlands

Alis ach William

Ann Griffiths, Welsh hymnist (composed orally).

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I saye to the agayne and doubte neuer the contrary that yf it were the custome to put the lytel maydens to the scole and sewyngly were made to lerne the scyences as they do to the man chyl dren, that they sholde lerne as parfytely, and they sholde be as wel entred in to the subtyltes of al the artes and scyences as they be, and peradventure there sholde be mo of them, for I haue touched here tofore by howe moche that women haue the body more softe than the man haue, and lesse habyle to do dyuers thynges, by so moche they haue the vnderstandynge more sharpe there as they apply it.

Christine de Pizan, *Livre de la Cité des Dames* (1405), tr. Bryan Anslay (London: Henry Pepwell, 1521)

yong women, maydenes, shulde be putte vnto scole to lerne vertous thinges of the scripture, wherethorughe thei may the beter see and knowe thaire sauement, and to duelle and for to eschewe al that is euil in manere . . . How be it there be suche men that haue opynion that thei wolde not that her wyues nor her doughtres shulde knowe no thinge of the scripture; as touchinge vnto the holy scripture it is no force, though women medille not nor knowe but litelle therof but forto rede, eueri woman it is the beter that canne rede and haue knowinge of the lawe of God, and forto haue be lerned to haue vertu and science to withstonde the perilles of the sowle, and forto use and excerse the werkys of thaire sauement, for that is thinge aproued and necessarie to alle women.

*Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry* (c. 1372), anon. English translation, *temp.* Henry VI (1422–61)

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The issue which Christine de Pizan and the Chevalier de la Tour Landry are addressing in these two passages<sup>1</sup> is central to the essays collected here: it has to do with women's access to a written culture, and their ability, or lack of it, to use that culture for their own ends, independent of the male authority by which it was sanctioned. The emphasis which the Chevalier places, in the book of instruction he wrote for his daughters, upon the spiritual benefits to be gained from the acquisition of the skill of reading is

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one which is familiar from the time of Jerome onwards, and which continued to be invoked beyond the chronological period covered by this book.<sup>2</sup> At the same time the dangers perceived in 'bokis that speke of loue fables, and of other wordely vanitees . . . of fayned stories and fables, suche as may not cause encrease of science, and is inprofitable vnto the soule',<sup>3</sup> ensured that thinking on the subject of the education of girls and women remained prescriptive: even Christine de Pizan, whose challenge to the prevailing orthodoxy is embodied in her varied output, as well as in her status as a professional writer, recommended that the lives of the virgin saints should form a staple of the reading diet of young girls.<sup>4</sup> In contemporary fiction, it is this implicit connection made between reading matter and behaviour, the presumption of direct influence, which underlies Criseyde's response to the suggestion made by Pandarus that she should throw away her widow's garb and do 'to May some observaunce'. Replying to him she says:

'Be ye mad?  
Is that a widewes lif, so God yow save? . . .  
It sattu me wel bet ay in a cave  
To bidde and rede on holy seyntes lyves . . .

(II, lines 113-14, 117-18)<sup>5</sup>

These words, coming as well after Criseyde's recital to Pandarus of the story of the 'romaunce . . . of Thebes' (II, lines 101-5), to which she has been listening with her women, are eloquent enough testimony to Chaucer's recognition of the moralists' position.<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless it is clear that, despite the apparent constraints imposed by such culturally determined thinking, women were able to appropriate religious writings for their own use. To quote the terms suggested by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, there remained a 'potential for slippage', whereby meaning became to a 'significant extent negotiable between reader and text, rather than automatically fixed by the text'; in other words, as in the example of Christina of Markyate and her reading of the legend of St Cecilia, it was possible for women to extract meaning relevant to their own lives and experiences from male-authored texts, as well as from those which they wrote themselves.<sup>7</sup> Felicity Riddy, in her essay, although she is dealing with material dating from around one to two hundred years later, shares common ground with Wogan-Browne. Developing the idea of there being a spiritual sub-culture amongst women, she demonstrates not only how women supported one another in their spirituality, but also how this sub-culture generated its own texts; for example, the *Revelation* of Julian of Norwich. Riddy's discussion, and in particular her emphasis upon the oral



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nature of many of these women's experiences of religious literature, frames many of the most urgent questions concerning women's engagement with literary culture, questions which inform Bella Millett's analysis of the role of women in the development of the English vernacular. Can the definition of literacy as it is applied to men in this period be equally well applied to women? Does it necessarily involve the ability to write, as well as to read? Or is it desirable, as Julia Boffey suggests, that we should develop a different vocabulary, one 'free from lettered associations', to describe women's activities? The difficulties of reconstructing a female *œuvre*, as outlined by Boffey, may in part reflect back upon clerical prescription: the disparagement of 'loue fables' and 'wordely vanitees' no doubt explains in part the paucity of evidence to associate such material with women writers, although acknowledgement must also be made of the difficulties of recording and transmission amongst those who did not automatically possess all the skills associated with literacy.

Different though social conditions in medieval Wales may have been, Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan's demonstration of the apparently considerable time-lag between the composing of much of the poetry by women and its preservation in writing indicates that here, too, women experienced a shutting-out from a written tradition, a point emphasised by the continuing orality of their work. But she also notes the role which modern prejudice has to play in the undervaluing of the contribution and achievements of women, in her forceful observation about their deliberate exclusion from the canon of Welsh poets by the present-day academic establishment. The quality and range of surviving poetry which can be associated with women authors in Wales during the Middle Ages, including as it does erotic and scatological verses as well as expressions of religious devotion, provides what is, in many ways, a striking contrast with the situation across the border. Yet in England, too, women either defied or ignored clerical dictate and formed an important part of the constituency for secular writing, in particular for romance. Judith Weiss explores the potential of women as patrons and readers of Anglo-Norman writing to influence *sens* and *matière* alike, while Flora Alexander investigates the conceptualisation of female sexuality in English romances of a slightly later period, arriving at the conclusion that in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth-century romances she considers, women are seen as participating in love on equal terms with men. The implications concerning audience and reception raised by this conclusion are intriguing: given that the evidence of wills suggests women's predilection for romance narratives (although references to texts in English are few and far between) there is clearly scope to investigate further the connections between the literary

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representation of women and the historical actuality of their lives, between production and consumption, or reception. Jennifer Fellows's essay, which arrives at a very different conclusion from Alexander's, in that she traces the ambivalence – and the occasional hostility – in attitudes towards women as mothers in a different group of Middle English romances, suggests the existence of another set of authorial imperatives, one governed by the concerns of a patriarchy. The implicit and explicit criticism expressed towards active women who attempt to direct their own fates, as well as those of their (usually male) children, in romances such as *Bevis of Hampton*, and the concomitant sympathy shown towards those who suffer changes in their fortunes passively, paradoxically serves to construct a model of female behaviour which would have been familiar to the religious moralists.

Themes and interests therefore interweave. Certain questions relating to women's engagement with the written word recur across the chronological span, despite the self-evident linguistic and social diversity of medieval Britain. These questions must include that of the freedom and choice open to women to act as their own interpreters of literary authority; to their activities as the writers and consumers of literature; to their status as the subjects of literary representation. The broad contours of a dimly perceived landscape are, perhaps, beginning to emerge. Yet, as with any comparable project, the completion contains within itself the suggestion of a new beginning. It would, for example, be rewarding to compare texts from the same genre, but written by male and female authors, to see whether there is any discernible gender bias in the construction of female characters, or in themes treated;<sup>8</sup> or to investigate 'particular moments and scenarios' in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of the complex of social, historical and literary influences at work.<sup>9</sup> For the twelfth century such an investigation could centre around the female literary culture of Barking Abbey, the contents and sources of its library and the connections of its residents with court and political circles; while for the fifteenth century a study of the women of a particular region, such as East Anglia, and their local networks of cultural patronage and political affinity might repay closer attention.<sup>10</sup> If the studies gathered together here provide a stimulus for future research of this kind, they will have fulfilled their purpose.

CAROL M. MEALE

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### NOTES

- 1 See RSTC 7271, and Thomas Wright (ed.), *The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, EETS OS 33 (1868), pp. 117–19. See also the translation of the Chevalier's work made by William Caxton (1484), in M. Y. Offord (ed.), *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, EETS SS 2 (1971), pp. 121–2.
- 2 See 'Ad Laetam de institutione filiae (398)', in F. A. Wright (ed.), *Select Letters of Jerome* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 345–7; and cf. the discussion in Diane Bornstein, *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1983), pp. 18–19. For a discussion of a similar emphasis in theories concerning female education in medieval France see Roberta Krueger, 'Constructing Sexual Identities in the High Middle Ages: The Didactic Poetry of Robert de Blois', *Paragraph* 13 (1990), 105–31, pp. 108–9, and the references cited there. Jerome's precepts are invoked briefly by Juan Luis Vives in the section on reading in his *De institutione foeminae christianae* (1524), written for Catherine of Aragon to guide her in the upbringing of her daughter Mary; see RSTC 24856 for the English translation by Richard Hyrd, published by Thomas Berthelet in London, in 1529.
- 3 Wright (ed.), *Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry*, p. 118.
- 4 On Christine see Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan – Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea, 1984) and Angus J. Kennedy, *Christine de Pizan: A Bibliographical Guide*, Research Bibliographies and Checklists (London: Grant & Cutler, 1984). Christine's comments on what constituted suitable reading matter for girls may be found in Sarah Lawson (trans.), *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 161; and cf. pp. 68, 88. She and the Chevalier de la Tour Landry both specify the life of St Catherine as being particularly edifying; this is an interesting choice, given that Catherine was learned, renowned for her skill in disputation, and the patron saint of philosophers and lawyers, as well as of young, unmarried girls.
- 5 Quotations are from Larry D. Benson (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).
- 6 Criseyde's copy of the romance was presumably (all anachronisms aside) in French; but for evidence of Englishwomen as readers of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* see below, p. 141.
- 7 On Christina of Markyate see below, pp. 64–5 and 105.
- 8 The *lais* of Marie de France, and the later Middle English translations/adaptations of them (*Sir Landevale*, *Sir Launfal*, and *Lay le Freine*) would be interesting candidates for this method of comparison. Janet Todd's analysis of genre 'as a system of historical and literary expectations and assumptions', in *Feminist Literary History: A Defence* (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), 99–102, p. 99, would be important here.
- 9 The phrase is Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's, as is the following suggestion concerning Barking Abbey. I am particularly grateful to her for discussing with me the ideas which arose from her own work for this book.
- 10 Part of the later medieval history of Barking has been charted by A. I. Doyle,

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‘Books Connected with the Vere Family and Barking Abbey’, *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society* 25 (1958), 222–43. For recent work on East Anglia which would facilitate study such as that outlined here, see Colin Richmond, *The Paston Family in the Fifteenth Century: the First Phase* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and Richard Beadle, ‘Prolegomena to a Literary Geography of Later Medieval Norfolk’, in Felicity Riddy (ed.), *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts: Essays Celebrating the Publication of ‘A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English’* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), pp. 89–108. Cf. the comments on some female East Anglian patrons and book-owners below, pp. 138, 141, 142–3.

## The power and the weakness of women in Anglo-Norman romance

JUDITH WEISS

Assumptions about the role of women in medieval romance have often sprung from a supposition that their general lack of power and influence in medieval society must necessarily be reflected by powerlessness in that society's fiction. So a recent historian has sweepingly dismissed 'the helpless damsels in courtly romances who are prone to victimisation by dragons'.<sup>1</sup> But, as she herself acknowledges in the same article, it is more usual for both historical and literary sources to provide conflicting images of women. It is the purpose of this essay to examine the ambivalent and inconsistent images of women provided by one small corner of medieval fiction – the Anglo-Norman romances of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries – and to consider how they relate to historical circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

Noblewomen in post-Conquest Britain appear to have enjoyed less political and economic power than either Anglo-Saxon women or their counterparts in France. In pre-Conquest England, women of the property-owning classes would seem to have had comparatively greater independence, education, status and freedom of choice in marriage. They could control an often substantial *morgengifu* after marriage; they could leave a marriage unpleasing to them, with their children and half the property; and their goods were not regarded by the courts as held in common with those of their husbands.<sup>3</sup> They could have a say in choosing their partner and were not repudiated if their marriage proved childless.<sup>4</sup> The evidence from the relatively few surviving wills is that both wives and daughters could inherit, control and bequeath property independently of their fathers and husbands, and some women, certainly, were the owners of considerable amounts of land.<sup>5</sup> As Christine Fell has indicated, this independent and respected status achieves a measure of recognition in Anglo-Saxon literature.<sup>6</sup>

In France, there was a gradual improvement in the economic rights of women under the Merovingians.<sup>7</sup> Under the Carolingians, they enjoyed

more security in marriage but owned less land; there was still a sizeable proportion of female landowners, though, especially in the *Regnum Francorum*, the areas in which Roman law survived.<sup>8</sup> In the tenth and eleventh centuries, a growing number of women appear as châtelaines, controlling minting, taxation and rights of justice.<sup>9</sup> The eleventh century marks the apex of this movement as 'waves of military and geographic expansion' combine to raise women to prominence in the absence of their menfolk; thereafter their economic status slowly declines. This decline in their status is not so marked as in England, however, and in Southern France it seems to remain high throughout the twelfth century.<sup>10</sup>

By contrast, post-Conquest women in England saw their freedom curtailed and their rights eroded. No married woman could now make a valid will without her husband's consent. She could inherit land, if there was no male heir in her family, but if she married, her husband had to control it; even if he died and she remarried, her new husband would do the same. It was rare for her to make charters and rare to witness those by other women.<sup>11</sup> The nobler she was, the more her choice of husband was controlled by others, concerned with questions of land, money and rank – and this despite the attempted insistence by canon lawyers that she should give her full and free consent to a match.<sup>12</sup>

The gradual lessening in female public activity in the Middle Ages is, in short, pronounced in post-Conquest England, in comparison with what had been the case before, and this situation is reflected in some of the distinctive ways in which Anglo-Norman romances portray their female characters. Romance also, of course, reflects contemporary religious and medical ideas on woman's supposed inferiority and imperfection, and her dangerous sexuality.<sup>13</sup> So we expect, and to an extent we get, a depiction of weak, subdued, imperfect females.

The Lincolnshire story of Haveloc, made into a short romance or *lai* at the end of the twelfth century, but first appearing in Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis* of 1135–40, has a heroine who is forced into a humiliating and degrading marriage. Argentille, orphaned heiress to the kingdom of Norfolk, is brought up by her uncle Edelsi, who has promised her dying father to marry her 'al plus fort home . . . k'en la terre trover poreit' [to the strongest man to be found in the land].<sup>14</sup> Desiring her patrimony, he interprets his oath literally by giving her to Haveloc, the strong and apparently baseborn scullion at his court. As in fairy-tales, the scullion turns out to be the heir to a kingdom (Denmark), but before Argentille discovers this, she must undergo all the shame of being 'mesmariee' [married below her station] (Gaimar, line 98). The way Gaimar arranges his story ensures that we are as much in the dark as the princess about

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Haveloc's origins and can sympathise with her predicament, which Gaimar underlines as much as he can in a swiftly moving narrative:

Il la dunad a un garçon  
Ki Cuaran aveit a nun;  
Pur ço abaisier la voleit,  
Se purpensa qu'il lui durreit. (lines 99-102)

(Il) Faseit sa niece od lui gisir,  
La fille al rei en povre lit.  
Ore est mestier que Deus aït  
Kar ci ot fait grant cruelté  
Pur cuveitise de cel regné,  
Quant pur le regne sul aveir  
Hunist sa niece a sun espeir. (lines 166-72)

He gave her to a boy who was called Cuaran; he planned to give her to him because he wanted to degrade her. He made his niece lie with him, the king's daughter in a poor bed. Now God needs to help, because he committed great cruelty out of desire for the kingdom, when, in order to possess it on his own, he humiliated his niece, as he supposed.

Argentille has additional reasons for complaint, since at first the marriage is not consummated: her husband doesn't know what to do with a woman (Gaimar, lines 175-88).

The *Lai d'Haveloc*, which takes Gaimar as its principal source, keeps this picture of the humiliated princess and improves upon it by emphasising her shame (line 386), Edelsi's spite (line 332) and her longing to keep her beggared condition away from the eyes of those who know her.

Melz voil ailurs estre mendive  
K'entre les mens estre cheitive. (lines 551-2)

I would rather be a beggar somewhere else than be despicable among my own people.

Argentille is the earliest of a number of heroines depicted in Anglo-Norman romances as being married off against their will. In this, of course, they accurately reflect contemporary medieval practice: despite the Church's insistence that children should not be forced into a marriage they hated, marriages amongst the upper social classes were usually arranged by the male relatives on both sides and did not take the particular wishes of the pair into account.<sup>15</sup> The marriages of heiresses were of especial importance, since they might be the sole surviving owner of large amounts of land. There are such heiresses in Anglo-Norman romance, several of whom, like Argentille, are orphaned. Galiene, in *Fergus*,<sup>16</sup> and La Fiere, in *Ipomedon*, are

both involved in wars with neighbours and under pressure from their vassals, who would like to coerce them into either marriage or a humiliating settlement. As in Chrétien's *Yvain*, the position of an unmarried châtelaine appears unenviable, especially in *Fergus*, where Galiene's spirited resistance to both her aggressive neighbour and her cowardly vassals only lays her open to insults.<sup>17</sup> In *Ipomedon*, the scenes have a more courtly air, and one of La Fiere's barons is allowed to present the argument that she should not marry where she cannot love (*Ipomedon*, line 2330). Nevertheless the pressure on her to marry continues, resulting in a tournament to test contenders for her hand. As Galiene's barons put it, 'terre ne puet gouverner / sans aide d'ome en avant' (*Fergus*, lines 6318–29): no woman can control land unaided.

Other heiresses are pressurised, not by vassals but by fathers or other male relatives, determined to unite daughters and kingdoms to men of suitably high rank. Ydoine, in *Amadas et Ydoine*, is unwillingly given to the Comte de Nevers; the heroines of *Horn* and *Boeve de Haumtone* have to undergo such marriages twice. The repetitive storyline is sometimes used to glorify the daring of the hero – in *Horn*, he twice rescues his betrothed from unwelcome unions – but can equally underscore the vulnerability of the woman: in *Boeve*, Josiane is forcibly married off whether at home or abroad and her lover arrives late, or not at all, to save her. Being a widow brings no respite from such coercion: the mother of Waldef is compelled to remarry so that her new husband may, through her, take power over the kingdom. Sometimes the heroes of the romances themselves, not yet receptive to the charms of the ladies – indeed, in order to protect themselves from them – will suggest that such coerced matches are only to be expected. Horn urges Rigmel to wait passively for a high-ranking suitor to find her and take her, 'for his use':

En taunt orrad li fiz d'aunkun empereür,  
Bele, parler de vus, kar d'autres estes flur,  
Si vus prendra a per a sun oes e oixor . . . (lines 1215–17)

Meanwhile, fair one, some emperor's son will hear tell of you, for you are the flower of all women, and then he will take you as spouse for his use, and wife.

The heroines, if their affections are not already engaged, are themselves anxious not to marry beneath them; like Argentille they don't want to be *mesmariee*. So Ydoine reacts angrily to Amadas' initial overtures because 'pucele sui de haut parage' [I am a maiden of high birth] (*Amadas et Ydoine*, line 532) and Felice follows suit in refusing Gui de Warewic: 'desparagee trop serreie'. [I should be disparaged, undervalued] (line 359).<sup>18</sup>

The political and economic position of these heroines is thus an



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unenviable one. They are all too often pawns in the games of others, denied choice and forced into situations of dependence and passivity. This is well represented in some of the scenes of feasting in romances. The women, by virtue of their very rank, may be excluded from these occasions which celebrate power, hospitality and the observance of order. Ydoine and Rigmel keep feast apart from the men and only hear of what happens through intermediaries. Their very beauty, too, is not necessarily an asset. Haveloc's friends hope that the appearance of his wife, Argentille, will move the Danish seneschal, when she appears in his hall, to enquire after her origins and so discover the identity of her husband; instead, it acts as the wrong kind of signal, attracting abductors intent on rape.<sup>19</sup>

These women are, in short, chattels who are valued according to their usefulness to their lovers, husbands, or male relatives, who put a high premium on their virginity. The violent reaction of the count, in *Amis e Amilun*, to the discovery that Amis and his daughter Florie are lovers, stems from his conviction that Amis has treacherously besmirched *his* honour by taking his daughter's maidenhood. But it is an honour entirely based on appearance, not fact. The count unquestioningly accepts his wicked steward's account of the affair, as it becomes 'true' when supported by the pledges of many of the other courtiers, labels his daughter accordingly as 'puteine' and is fully prepared to see her, and his wife (a pledge for Florie) burn. When, however, Amilun impersonating Amis turns up for the judicial combat, the count abruptly changes his tune: whoever looks likely to win the fight now represents the truth for him:

Li coens, kant le chevaler *veit*,  
Bien quidout ke ceo fust Amis,  
De cors resemblout e de viz.  
Bones armes demanda  
E meimes le chivaler arma;  
En sun corage bien fud païé,  
Kant le *vii* si bel armé.  
Puis li dist suef en l'oraille  
Ke, s'il peust veintre la bataille,  
Sa fille a femme li dorreit  
E de tote sa terre eir le freit.

(lines 572-82, my emphasis)

When the count saw the knight, he certainly thought it was Amis, he was like him in body and face. He asked for good armour and armed the knight himself; he was well satisfied in his heart when he saw him so well armed. Then he whispered in his ear that, if he could win the battle, he would give him his daughter to wife and make him heir to all his land.

What the count, and his society, *see* is what matters. His daughter's honour, and his, depend on these entirely external factors.

Lovers, like fathers, cannot be closely associated with women perceived as soiled goods. Both Boeve and Horn, returning to rescue their mistresses from unwelcome marriages, must check on whether they are still *enterine*, chaste. These testing scenes both use animals, literally or symbolically, to query or demonstrate virginity. Horn's sexual riddles to Rigmel and to her new husband compare her to a mewed falcon whose wings and tail may be damaged (lines 4257–68) or, more coarsely still, to a net that may have caught a fish (lines 4045–52). Only if she is undamaged may she be 'carried off' (lines 4052, 4255): the involuntary nature of Rigmel's fate is striking. It would be surprising if Josiane, married for seven years, were *virgo intacta* (as Boeve points out, not without humour) but she too has retained her chastity, just as she has kept Boeve's horse, with whom she is closely connected throughout the romance.<sup>20</sup> So it is the horse that Boeve wants to see, on his return (lines 1429–31), and the animal which has attacked Josiane's husband when he wanted to mount it, joyfully allows the hero on its back (lines 1454–64).

The somewhat more independent, less humiliatingly passive, position of widows in medieval society<sup>21</sup> is also reflected in these romances. Candace (in *Alexander*), Ydoine, and Medea (in *Protheselaus*) have more freedom of action, and especially greater freedom of choice, than unmarried girls: they can bestow their favours and their lands on whom they like. Yet this independence, when scrutinised closely, turns out to be qualified in a number of ways. Candace, queen of India, makes advances to Alexander well before her husband's death and thus serves the misogynistic poet well as an example of feminine deceit. He even makes her characterise herself as one of a long line of betrayers: 'tuit temps est usage / Qe femme deceit homme' [it's always been the custom for woman to deceive man] (lines 7710–11). Independent action is thus vicious action. Ydoine – not strictly a widow, because she is separated from her first husband, but with all the freedom of one – gets her father to admit that her first marriage was a mistake and that this time she should marry whom she likes. She still however has to use *bel engin* (line 7517) subtly to manipulate father and barons into choosing Amadas, for social and feudal reasons, as the most suitable candidate for her hand. The widowed Medea is free to love Protheselaus and to help his cause with her soldiers, but is comically unsuccessful in keeping him by her side for more than a few minutes. Her independence is vitiated here, not because the narrative reflects actual social circumstances but because the poet fashions it to burlesque current

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conventional romance motifs, such as the hero's need to eschew his mistress's sight until he has proved himself worthy of her.<sup>22</sup> So, despite all Medea's efforts, Protheselaus continually postpones their union, while swearing that he cannot live without seeing her (lines 2821-3).

This last portrayal of a woman, then, is self-consciously literary; but, Medea apart, the other female characters in Anglo-Norman romance appear to reflect the realities of life for well-born women in the early medieval period. Their actions are restricted, their choices limited or ignored, they are often victim rather than perpetrator. Yet there is another, equally important, side to the picture. The women in these romances, especially those who rise above mere cardboard figures, seldom come over as weak, passive, helpless: on the contrary, they impress us by their initiative and resourcefulness. They compensate for their subordinate position by exercising power through other channels, though occasionally they also have the opportunity to play a male role. The forcefulness of some of these women, especially in juxtaposition to less strong-willed or able heroes, is at first unexpected in a romance context, though it is a not uncommon feature of both continental and insular *chansons de geste*.<sup>23</sup>

Women's indirect exercise of power through education and talent is clearly displayed in several of these poems, which all attribute learning, skill and wisdom to their female characters. These are traits which we expect to find in courtly descriptions, but which are functional, not merely decorative: they often further the heroine's designs. It is the *enseignée* [accomplished, educated] Argentille who knows the ruse of using dead men to simulate the living, by which she deters Haveloc from abandoning the invasion of England and which enables him to win against the odds (Gaimar, lines 771-88; *Lai d'Haveloc*, lines 1055-84); thus she regains her inheritance. It is Argentille too who is earlier given the prophetic dream: she is not convinced by Haveloc's kitchen-bound interpretation of it and it impels her to seek a way out of the degrading situation they are in. Wisdom, in other words, is granted to the one best fitted to use it.

Josiane supports herself, during a search for her husband, by singing (*Boeve de Hamtome*, lines 2784-7).<sup>24</sup> Lenburc, the Irish princess in *Horn*, is an expert chess player, though this does not advance her with the hero as much as she had hoped. Iseut is one of the most accomplished heroines: taught how to harp by Tristan, taught the arts of healing by her mother. These she uses to heal Tristan twice from wounds, and this is recalled both in the *Folies Tristan*<sup>25</sup> and in the death-scene in Thomas's *Tristan*. Love as medicine for the lover is of course an idea current from Ovid's time at least, but Iseut's command of medicines relates her more to the equally venerable

idea of woman as *venefica*, the potion-maker and user of magic:

Par grant mecine e par engin  
Me guaresistes del venim.

(*Folie d'Oxford*, lines 425–6)

By powerful medicine and by skill you have cured me of the poison.

Etienne de Fougères castigates the 'femme-sorcière' who poisons infants in the womb and husbands in the prime of life.<sup>26</sup> As Hallissy points out,<sup>27</sup> the *venefica* was an image of female power, derived from her special, secret knowledge. In making their heroines talented in this sphere, romance poets risked portraying them as unsympathetic. Yet it was not a new departure: *chanson de geste* poets had done likewise with the *beles Sarrasines* in *Elie de Saint Gille*, *Mainet* and *Floovant*, who are portrayed as both beautiful and admirable. The French epic had a great influence on early Anglo-Norman romance, so that the Saracen Josiane in *Boeve de Haumtone* is likewise a 'sorceress' and likewise sympathetically described. Like Fenice in Chrétien's *Cligés*, and the later Ydoine, she uses magic to protect her from unwelcome sexual contact:

Ele out appris aukes de enchantement,  
une ceinture fist de seie bien tenaunt,  
la ceinture fu fete par tele devisement,  
se une femme le ust ceinte desuz son vestement,  
il n'i avereit homme en secle vivant  
ki de cocher ove li avereit accun talent  
ne aprucher au lit la ou ele fu gisaunt.

(lines 997–1005)

She had learnt a little sorcery: she made a belt of clinging silk. The belt was made in such a fashion that if a woman put it on underneath her clothes there was not a man in the world who would have any desire to sleep with her, or approach the bed where she lay.

Ydoine does not have magical powers herself but employs three witches to enchant and terrify her future husband into leaving her untouched. There is a sharp contrast here with the Tristan story: the poets who handled that saw as one of its principal ingredients the anguish of a woman whose body has to be shared between husband and lover. So Iseut does not use her powers to protect her from Mark's conjugal advances. But the authors of *Boeve* and *Amadas* are not interested in such moral dilemmas. For them, as for Chrétien, it is essential the heroine's virginity be preserved for the hero, by whatever improbable means.

The men in these romances generally appear less learned than the women. They are taught the arts of hunting, hawking and fencing, learn to

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play backgammon and chess, but cannot read.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, Felice, in *Gui de Warewic*, has been taught the seven liberal arts (astronomy, geometry and arithmetic are singled out for mention), and Medea, her name recalling the Greek sorceress, has a fountain with a wide range of curative properties.<sup>29</sup> Yet in the case of these heroines, at least, learning does not confer power. Medea, as I mentioned earlier, cannot get access to her lover; Felice's arts do not help her to keep Gui, once he has decided to devote his life to God. In this respect half the romance shows her as singularly power-less. Where she does wield power is in starting Gui off on his martial career by withholding her favours until he wins renown. Here she joins a number of heroines in both continental and insular romance whose important educative role is to encourage the hero to fulfil his potential. Again, woman as helpmeet and encourager is to be found in *chanson de geste* too: Guibourc spurs Guillaume into action in *La Chanson de Guillaume*. But in several of the Anglo-Norman romances the woman encouraging and manipulating the man actually emerges as stronger and more capable than he.

'Feme estes, si dites folie' [you're a woman and so talk nonsense/ folly]: the traditional stereotype is crossly thrown at the heroine in *Fergus* (line 5221), but in two romances, *Haveloc* and *Amadas*, the *fol*, whether simple or insane, is the hero. Haveloc, in both Gaimar and the *Lai*, is handsome, strong and generous, but also naive, ignorant and notably passive, submitting to the will of others, happy to be told what to do.<sup>30</sup> He is the 'dümmling' common in both folk-tale and romance. It is Argentille who takes decisions, instigates action, possesses resource and initiative: she is the true protagonist of the *Lai d'Haveloc*. Ydoine is similarly far more powerful than Amadas, whose emotional dependence on her is such that he goes insane on hearing of her impending marriage. The degradation of the 'fol dervé' [crazed fool] is described in a remarkably powerful scene: naked and dirty he passes along the street followed by all the 'fripaille' and children of the town, beating and tearing him till the blood runs. Ydoine, in contrast always self-possessed and resourceful, rescues her lover and restores him to sanity by the constant repetition of her name, as if it had divine powers.<sup>31</sup> In short these two forceful ladies at times assume the traditional male role of taking action and displaying enterprise. In other Anglo-Norman romances this 'masculine' quality is most often in evidence when it is a matter of sexual choice. 'It does not belong to virginal modesty to choose a husband', thundered Ambrose,<sup>32</sup> but in six out of the fourteen extant romances, it is the woman who woos. Once again the influence of *chanson de geste*, on the wane by the thirteenth century, is probably discernible here. Contemporary didactic treatises on behaviour did not approve of women offering themselves to men, but these romances mostly

portray such women in a sympathetic and favourable light.<sup>33</sup> Approval often coexists uneasily with misogyny, however, so that we may be unsure which position is truly a writer's own. Candace is 'cointe, envoiee e sage' [clever, eloquent, and wise], but in 'imprisoning' Alexander (line 7718) she also becomes an epitome of feminine deceit, even though the story clearly shows Alexander's attempt to deceive *her*. La Pucele, in *Protheselaus*, is another prisoner of the hero; she also seizes weapons and fights like any epic hero:

Son graille en halt fait soner,  
 Tuz (s)es chevalers fait monter.  
 Et el mē(i)sme cum desve(e)  
 Sor un bon destrer est munte(e).  
 En tel guise set a(l) cheval  
 Cum si ço fust un (bon) vassal:  
 El poing la lance, el col l'escu . . .  
 E ad fait une juste fiere.  
 Un des (dis) compaignons feri  
 Que l'escu tut l(i) purfendi  
 Et puis le bon osberc safré;  
 Parmi le cors l'ad assené,  
 A terre l'ad mort trebuché,  
 Puis dit: 'Mi homme erent vengé,  
 Mar estes entrez en ma terre,  
 Guerre querez, vus avrez guerre!' (lines 7180-97)

She had her horn loudly sounded and made all her knights mount. And she herself, like one crazed, mounted a good steed. She sat the horse in such a way as if she were a good fighter: lance in hand, shield round her neck . . . And she made a fierce joust: she struck one of the ten companions, splitting all his shield and then his good decorated hauberk; she pierced him through the body and overturned him dead on the ground. Then she said: 'My men will be avenged. It was foolish to enter my land: if you seek war, you shall have it!'

This Britomart is significantly described as *desvee* and her usurpation of a man's role is a tactic not crowned with success: she does not get her man.

Hue de Rotelande's image of woman as both powerful and powerless is, as we have seen, shared by the other writers of Anglo-Norman romance in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. But it is the *powerful* side which continues to interest me. Where does it come from? What factors in post-Conquest society contribute to the portrayal of these surprisingly formidable women? Were the poets influenced by a dim memory of the power wielded by English women before, and just after,<sup>34</sup> the Conquest, or by rather more recent knowledge of the position of women in France, better off in terms of rights and status than their post-Conquest English

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counterparts? It is more likely, I think, that they knew, and were influenced by, women of substance and authority in the families of their patrons, and indeed who may themselves have *been* their patrons. I want to conclude by considering these women.

Unfortunately, we have little factual evidence to help us here. Despite the work of Professor Legge, not much is certainly known of the patrons of the romances. Apart from the Fitzwarin family for whom the late *Fouke Fitzwarin* was written, we can point to only two certainties and two strong probabilities. But at least these provide us with some tantalising pieces of information.

One certain patron is Hue de Rotelande's, Gilbert Fitzbaderon, lord of Monmouth.<sup>35</sup> The women in his family appear, for some generations, to have been both active and prominent, regularly appearing in charters of gifts to the Abbey of St Florent in Saumur as witnesses, confirmers and donors.<sup>36</sup> This appearance points to some degree of participation in the economic affairs of the family, especially when the wife's consent or advice is invoked.<sup>37</sup> Gilbert's mother, Rohese, has a high profile in this respect. A member of the wealthy and powerful Clare family, she appears amongst them as a donor in a charter between 1128 and 1138, when she, her mother and two younger brothers confirm a gift to Thorney Abbey.<sup>38</sup> At her marriage to Baderon of Monmouth, on All Saints' Day at Chepstow, she is given away by her brother Gilbert Strongbow, first earl of Pembroke, and jointly with Baderon makes a gift to Monmouth Priory.<sup>39</sup> Rohese appears again as joint donor and confirmer, with Baderon, of property to the Abbey of St Florent.<sup>40</sup> She also witnesses charters, together with her husband, 'seeing and hearing' with him, for example, when Roger earl of Hereford, grants a church to Monmouth Priory.<sup>41</sup> By 1166 she must have died, because Baderon gives a knight's fee to the Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem 'pro anima ejus'.<sup>42</sup>

Another Rohese of Monmouth, probably Rohese de Clare's daughter and Gilbert's sister, carries on the family tradition of making gifts to Monmouth Priory. Her first husband<sup>43</sup> may have been her cousin Richard de Cormelles: a 'Rohes' advised him on the gift of Tadinton church to the Priory in the 1140's.<sup>44</sup> After her marriage to Hugh de Lacy, the powerful Marcher Baron, they jointly gave the Priory 'three solidos'.<sup>45</sup> She had three children by Hugh, died some time before 1180, and was buried in the Abbey of St Thomas, Dublin, Hugh having been given Dublin and its castle by Henry II in 1172.<sup>46</sup> Her sons made gifts to the Abbey and their charters repeatedly mention her burial there, expressing the hope that the gifts will help to save her soul.<sup>47</sup>

Gilbert Fitzbaderon's mother and sister may thus both have impressed

Hue de Rotelande as women of some power and standing. Of their literary interests we know nothing. On the other hand, Bertha, wife of Gilbert, may well have been interested in books and writers, to judge from the context in which her name appears in a monastic charter. We know less of her than of the two Roheses: her family is unknown and the sole evidence for her existence is in charters of the Cistercian foundation of Flaxley, in Gloucestershire. Here she appears twice as joint donor with Gilbert, and after his death she is cited as the 'domina' from whom Hugo de Charke holds his estates in 1195 and 1201.<sup>48</sup> In view of the elaborate tribute Hue de Rotelande pays, at the end of *Protheselaus*, to Gilbert's literary interests – his well-stocked library, his judicious selection of a book from it for 'translation'<sup>49</sup> – it is fascinating to read the details of one of Gilbert and Bertha's donations. The five shillings and the customs dues they give the Abbey are to be used to buy sacramental wine, but it is stated that if there is money over, 'the sum might be applied with the consent of the whole chapter to the repair of books'. Gilbert and Bertha want to support the Abbey library.<sup>50</sup>

The possible patrons of *Boeve de Haumtone* are the Albini family, earls of Arundel, and they too include women of substance. I have put forward elsewhere the hypothesis that the romance could have been started for the second earl and given a continuation that alludes to the third.<sup>51</sup> The wives of William II and William III d'Albini were remarkable people. Adeliza of Louvain, daughter of the duke of Brabant, and apparently of singular beauty, married Henry I in 1120/1. While queen, she witnessed charters with Henry<sup>52</sup> and acted as Regent in his absence. She also patronised writers like Benedeit, author of the *Voyage of St Brendan*, and Philippe de Thaon.<sup>53</sup> After Henry's death, she married William II d'Albini in 1139 and passed to him her honour of Arundel Castle; she also made a quantity of foundations and benefactions.<sup>54</sup> After bearing William seven children, she retired to the Flemish Abbey of Affligem, to which she gave 'fine English lands',<sup>55</sup> and died there in 1151. Adeliza was obviously a considerable landowner and benefactor in her own right, a woman of rank and power, and also a lady of literary interests. Her daughter-in-law was also powerful and independent. Maud was the only child and heiress of James de St Hilaire; on her marriage to Roger de Clare, earl of Hertford, she brought nine knights' fees and lands in Northampton, Oxfordshire and Norfolk. On his death in 1173 she married William III d'Albini. In both marriages she frequently appears as acting independently in financial transactions: in 1166 she is a property-owner from whom knights' fees are held;<sup>56</sup> she possesses her own seal;<sup>57</sup> and though she occasionally appears as donor or witness with William, mostly the benefactions she makes are her own.<sup>58</sup> He



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did hold her St Hilaire honour *de jure uxoris*, but after his death, despite his son and heir, it reverted to her and finally to her son by her first marriage.<sup>59</sup> Maud gives the impression of managing much of her inheritance herself, in contrast with the majority of noble medieval wives. The poet of *Boeve* would not have been short of models amongst the Albini wives on which to base the resourceful and energetic Josiane.

Our last well-born female patron has already been well researched. She is Constance, wife of Ralf Fitzgilbert, for whom Gaimar produced his *Estoire des Engleis* with its first account of the Haveloc story. It is possible she was an heiress from the de Venoz family in Hampshire, and she married a well-known figure in Lincolnshire, who was a founder and benefactor of religious houses in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Hampshire.<sup>60</sup> With him she appears making grants to Pontefract priory and giving the chapel of Empshott to Southwick priory. According to Gaimar's Epilogue, she borrowed a copy of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* from her husband and gave it to Gaimar to work on for the *Estoire*. He compliments her: she started off his endeavours and without her help he would not have finished them. Obviously a woman of some education, she has read and re-read David's life of Henry I.<sup>61</sup> Here there is evidence of taste and patronage and perhaps of a certain amount of economic independence (Empshott chapel may have belonged to her).<sup>62</sup> Constance, like the Monmouth and Albini ladies, was no passive and powerless cipher but a respected and influential woman.<sup>63</sup>

It would be too simple a view of the complicated relations between literature and life to assert that the Anglo-Norman romance poets based their heroines narrowly on the women in the families for whom they wrote. But in portraying women who were energetic, able, even formidable – despite being held in check by misogynistic comment, threatened with violence or married off against their will – some of these poets had before them in their daily lives just such women, who were educated, interested in learning, relatively independent: who had, in other words, the 'power' conferred by birth, family, rank, possessions and tastes. The experience of such women, so manifestly superior to the traditional clerical and Pauline view of inferior and helpless females, seems very likely to have influenced the literary portrayal of a Josiane or an Argentille. That the romances retain interest for us today is in large part due to their creation of these female characters, who challenge the stereotypes of their period and, in so doing, come alive.

## NOTES

- 1 Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'The Female Felon in Fourteenth-Century England', in S. M. Stuard (ed.), *Women in Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), 125-40, p. 127.
- 2 The romances are available in the following editions: A. Bell (ed.), Geffrei Gaimar, *L'Estoire des Engleis*, ANTS (1960); A. Bell (ed.), *Lai d'Haveloc*, Publications of the University of Manchester French Series 4 (Manchester, 1925); E. Martin (ed.), Guillaume le Clerc, *Fergus* (Halle: Buch. des Waisenhauses, 1872), also the edition by Wilson Frescoln (Philadelphia: William H. Allen, 1983) (cited from Martin); E. Kölbing and E. Koschwitz (eds.), Hue de Rotelande, *Ipomedon* (Breslau: Koebner, 1889), also the edition by A. J. Holden (Paris: Klincksieck, 1979); F. Kluckow (ed.), Hue de Rotelande, *Protheselaus*, Gesellschaft für romanische Literatur 45 (Göttingen, 1924); J. R. Reinhard (ed.), *Amadas et Ydoine* (Paris: Champion, 1926); M. K. Pope (ed.), *The Romance of Horn*, 2 vols., ANTS (1955, 1964); A. Stimming (ed.), *Der anglonormannische Boeve de Haumtone* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1899); A. Ewert (ed.), *Gui de Warewic*, 2 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1932-3); E. Kölbing (ed.), *Amis e Amilum* (Heilbronn: Gebr. Henninger, 1884); B. Foster and I. Short (eds.), Thomas of Kent, *The Anglo-Norman Alexander*, 2 vols., ANTS (1976, 1977); A. J. Holden (ed.), *Waldef*, Bibliotheca Bodmeriana Textes 5 (Geneva, 1984); J. Bédier (ed.), *Les deux poèmes de La Folie Tristan* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907); E. Hoepffner (ed.), *La Folie Tristan de Berne* (Paris: Société d'édition: Les Belles Lettres, 1934).
- 3 Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), pp. 57-9. See also Sheila C. Dietrich, 'An Introduction to Women in Anglo-Saxon Society (c. 600-1066)', and Marc C. Meyer, 'Land Charters and the Legal Position of Anglo-Saxon Women', in Barbara Kanner (ed.), *The Women of England from Anglo-Saxon Times to the Present: Interpretive Bibliographical Essays* (1979; repr. London: Mansell, 1980), pp. 32-56, 57-82.
- 4 Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 58, 61, 74; D. M. Stenton, *The English Woman in History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), pp. 20-3.
- 5 Only fifty-eight wills survive, on which see Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 76, 95, 89-91. Pauline Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), pp. 174-6, offers a more cautionary view of this evidence, pointing out that class was probably as important a determinant of women's worldly fortunes as gender; and cf. her 'Women in Domesday', *Reading Medieval Studies* 15 (1989), 75-94, p. 89, for a warning as to the care which should be exercised in using this collection of documents as the means 'of arguing for great changes in the status of women across the Norman Conquest'.
- 6 Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 35-6, 50; but cf. Joyce Hill, "'Paet Wæs Geomoru Ides!": A Female Stereotype Examined', in Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (eds.), *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 235-47.
- 7 S. F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), p. 44.

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- 8 Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, pp. 112, 116.
- 9 D. Herlihy, 'Land, Family and Women in Continental Europe, 701-1200', in Stuard (ed.), *Women in Medieval Society*, 13-45, p. 33; Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 122.
- 10 Herlihy, 'Land, Family and Women', p. 27; see also R. Hajdu, 'The Position of Noblewomen in the Pays des Coutumes 1100-1300', *Journal of Family History* 5 (1980), 122-144.
- 11 Cecily Clark, 'After 1066: The Factual Evidence', in Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, 148-71, p. 154; Stenton, *The English Woman in History*, pp. 30, 36.
- 12 Christopher Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 152-7.
- 13 V. L. Bullough, 'Medieval Medical Views of Women', *Viator* 4 (1973), 487-93, p. 492; M. Hallissy, *Venomous Woman* (Connecticut: Greenwood, 1987); Judith Weiss, 'The Wooing Woman in Anglo-Norman Romance', in Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows and Carol M. Meale (eds.), *Romance in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), 149-61, pp. 150-1.
- 14 *Lai d'Haveloc*, lines 227-8 (this, and all subsequent translations, are my own).
- 15 J. T. Noonan, 'Power to Choose', *Viator* 4 (1973), 419-34; G. Duby, *Medieval Marriage*, trans. Elborg Forster (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 5. See, for a specifically English example, C. H. Talbot (ed. and trans.), *The Life of Christina of Markyate* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959; repr. 1987); Brooke, *Medieval Idea of Marriage*, pp. 144-8.
- 16 It is debatable whether *Fergus* should be called Anglo-Norman. Both Dominica Legge and Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann think it should (M. D. Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 161-2; B. Schmolke-Hasselmann, *Der arturische Versroman von Chrestien bis Froissart*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie 177 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1980). Its most recent editor thinks the link to Alan of Galloway 'inconclusive' (*Fergus*, ed. Frescoln, p. 28). For the most recent discussion, see D. D. R. Owen, 'The Craft of Guillaume de Clerc's *Fergus*', in Leigh A. Arrathoon (ed.), *The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetics* (Rochester: Solaris Press, 1984).
- 17 *Fergus*, ed. Martin, lines 5171-293. The enemy's intention is to degrade her sexually as well as seizing her land (lines 5110-11).
- 18 It is interesting that, as Hajdu, 'The Position of Noblewomen', has pointed out, in Northern France between 1100 and 1300 there were numerous alliances between noblewomen and their social inferiors. Gautier d'Arras' romance *Ille et Galeron* depicts with great insight the tensions that could arise in such an alliance.
- 19 *Lai d'Haveloc*, lines 651-60, 679-95.
- 20 There are two dreams which equate Josiane and the horse (lines 2731-41, 3437-43). When Josiane is dying, Boeve finds Arundel dead in his stable; it confirms him in his knowledge that his wife will die (lines 3809-26).
- 21 Sue Sheridan Walker, 'Widow and Ward: The Feudal Laws of Child Custody in Medieval England', in Stuard (ed.), *Women in Medieval Society*, 159-72, pp. 88, 161; Clark, 'After 1066: The Factual Evidence', p. 157.

- 22 See J. E. Weiss, 'A Reappraisal of Hue de Rotelande's *Protheselaus*', *Medium Aevum* 52 (1983), 104-110, pp. 107-8.
- 23 See Weiss, 'Wooing Woman', pp. 149, 151-3.
- 24 Her musical talents are again in evidence later, but this is an abrupt and unmotivated insertion in the story (lines 3098-101).
- 25 The *Folie Tristan d'Oxford* (the Anglo-Norman text) shares this reminder of Iseut's healing skills with the continental *Folie Tristan de Berne*.
- 26 Josef Kremer (ed.), Etienne de Fougères, *Le Livre des Manières* (Marburg: Elwert, 1887), lines 1034ff.
- 27 Hallissy, *Venomous Woman*, pp. xii-xiv.
- 28 Hue de Rotelande, *Protheselaus*, lines 676, 7916; see Bérout's *Tristan* in J. C. Payen, *Le Tristan en vers* (Paris: Garnier, 1974), p. 79.
- 29 *Gui de Warewic*, lines 63-8; Hue de Rotelande, *Protheselaus*, lines 2914-34. Allowing for literary exaggeration, this is consonant with C. P. Wormald's findings that laywomen in both the Anglo-Saxon period and the later Middle Ages were often better educated than men (C. P. Wormald, 'The Uses of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England and its Neighbours', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 27, 1977, 95-114, pp. 98-110); Clark, on the other hand, considers Anglo-Norman women normally had less access to schooling than men ('After 1066: The Factual Evidence', p. 166).
- 30 'Je ferai ço que vus volez' [I will do what you want], Gaimar, line 315; see J. E. Weiss, 'Structure and Characterisation in *Havelok the Dane*', *Speculum* 44 (1969), 247-57, p. 252.
- 31 *Amadas et Ydoine*, lines 3341ff. The poet both suggests and avoids blasphemy, lines 3395-403.
- 32 In *De Abrahamo*, 1.9.91, quoted in Noonan, 'Power to Choose', p. 424.
- 33 See Weiss, 'Wooing Woman', pp. 150ff.
- 34 Stenton, *The English Woman in History*, p. 29.
- 35 *Protheselaus*, lines 12,700-2; see Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, pp. 85-6.
- 36 See J. H. Round, *Calendar of Documents Preserved in France* (London: HMSO, 1899), 1, pp. 406-10. The wife and daughters of William Fitzbaderon three times confirm his gifts to St Florent and are granted in return 'the benefits of fellowship' by the abbot (p. 408).
- 37 Hajdu, 'Position of Noblewomen', pp. 125ff.; P. Marchegay, *Chartes anciennes du Prieuré de Monmouth* (Les Roches-Baritaud, Vendée, 1879), pp. 23, 32; Margaret, wife of Hugo, son of Richard de Cormelles (a cousin of Gilbert Fitzbaderon) witnesses and consents to charters; Rohes, wife of Richard, advises on a gift (Round, *Calendar*, p. 409).
- 38 F. M. Stenton (ed.), *Facsimiles of Early Charters from Northamptonshire Collections* (Lincoln and London: for the Northamptonshire Record Society, 1930), p. 52.
- 39 W. Dugdale, *Monasticon anglicanum* (London: Bohn, 1846), iv, pp. 596-7; Marchegay, *Chartes*, p. 23.
- 40 Round, *Calendar*, p. 410.
- 41 Ibid. p. 410; Dugdale, *Monasticon anglicanum*, p. 597; A. Morey and C. N. L. Brooke (eds.), *The Letters and Charters of Gilbert Foliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 385. Foliot asked the Bishop of Hereford for 'stern

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- action' to be taken against Baderon and his wife: perhaps Rohese had been claiming rights over her property too vigorously? (p. 103, n. 3).
- 42 H. Hall (ed.), *Liber rubens de scaccario*, Rolls Series (London: HMSO, 1896), p. 280; T. Hearne (ed.) *Liber niger scaccarii* (London, 1774), I, p. 153.
  - 43 J. T. Gilbert is the only one (to my knowledge) to refer to Rohese's 'second' marriage: J. T. Gilbert (ed.), *Register of the Abbey of St Thomas, Dublin*, Rolls Series (London: HMSO, 1889), p. 13. J. A. Bradney, *A History of Monmouthshire* (London: Mitchell, Hughes and Clarke, 1904-32), p. 4, confuses the two Roheses.
  - 44 Round, *Calendar*, p. 409.
  - 45 Dugdale, *Monasticon anglicanum*, p. 597.
  - 46 W. E. Wightman, *The Lacy Family in England and Normandy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 191-4.
  - 47 Gilbert, *Register*, charters II, V, VI and VII.
  - 48 A. W. Crawley-Boevey, *The Cartulary and Historical Notes of the Cistercian Abbey of Flaxley* (Exeter: privately printed, 1887), charters 6, 7, 53 and 65.
  - 49 *Protheselaus*, lines 12,698-711; the lines are discounted by Professor Legge as 'conventional compliment' (*Anglo-Norman Literature*, p. 95).
  - 50 Crawley-Boevey, *Cartulary*, charter 6, p. 133; introduction, p. 62. The catalogue of the Abbey library still exists. See N. R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*, 2nd edn. (London: Royal Historical Society, 1964), p. 87; and the *Supplement* to this edition, ed. Andrew G. Watson (London: Royal Historical Society, 1987), p. 37.
  - 51 Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, p. 159; J. E. Weiss, 'The Date of the Anglo-Norman Boeve de Haumtone', *Medium Aevum* 55 (1986), 237-41.
  - 52 Round, *Calendar*, p. 289.
  - 53 Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, pp. 9-13, 22.
  - 54 Leslie Stephen (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, I (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1885), pp. 137-8.
  - 55 F. C. Butkens, *Trophées tant sacrés que profanes du Duché de Brabant*, 3rd edn. (The Hague, 1724), I, p. 108.
  - 56 M. Altschul, *A Baronial Family in Medieval England: The Clares 1217-1314* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), pp. 94, 101.
  - 57 Stenton, *Facsimiles*, p. 130.
  - 58 Vicary Gibbs (ed.), G. E. Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage* (London: St Catharine Press, 1910-59), VI, p. 500; Dugdale, *The Baronage of England* (London: Tho. Newcomb for Abel Roper, John Martin and Henry Herringman, 1675-6), I, p. 211; Stenton, *Facsimiles*, pp. 130-1; L. C. Loyd and D. M. Stenton (eds.), *Sir Christopher Hatton's Book of Seals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), no. 464.
  - 59 Altschul, *Baronial Family*, p. 25.
  - 60 A. Bell, 'Gaimar's Patron, Raul le Fiz Gilebert', *Notes and Queries*, 12th series 8 (1921), 104-5; D. M. Williamson, 'Ralf son of Gilbert and Ralf son of Ralf', *Lincolnshire Architectural and Archaeological Society; Reports and Papers* 5, Part I (1953), 19-26; Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, p. 28.
  - 61 Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis*, lines 6430-92.
  - 62 Williamson, 'Ralf', p. 25.
  - 63 I should like to thank Dr Martin Brett for his help with historical sources.

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FLORA ALEXANDER

Despite the bias towards the masculine that is exhibited in the corpus of Old English poetry which we possess, the voice of a woman expressing longing for her lover, and grief at being parted from him, is also heard. It is there in *The Wife's Lament*, notwithstanding the efforts made by some readers to deny it by, for instance, arguing that three successive uses of feminine inflections must be due to scribal error.<sup>1</sup> A woman's feelings are even more powerfully recorded in the paradoxical pressure of the narrator's words in *Wulf and Eadwacer*, as she laments her separation from Wulf, her lover.

Þæt mon eaþe tosliteð      þætte næfre gesomnad wæs,  
uncer giedd geador.<sup>2</sup> (lines 18–19)

That is easily torn apart which was never joined, our song together.

There is further evidence of an interest in female desire, and the sorrow of separation, in the Latin *Cambridge Songs* of Cambridge University Library MS Gg. 5. 35, which were copied from a Continental original for the monastery of St Augustine at Canterbury in the middle of the eleventh century.<sup>3</sup> These, although they do not emanate from an English source, demonstrate at least the presence in England of texts that deal, sometimes erotically, with women's sexuality. Clifford Davidson has suggested that in both the Old English and the Latin 'women's songs' associated with Anglo-Saxon England we can find the expression of what he calls a *mythos* of women's love, the two basic elements of which are desire and the longing induced by separation. Deprivation creates a particular emotional intensity, and Davidson sees in this poetry a kind of feeling, generated by conflict between sexual love and societal bonds, that looks forward to the story of Isolt.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear, then, that the use of love as a subject in English literature in the thirteenth century cannot be a completely new development, and that the

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notion of female passion was not unheard of before the Norman Conquest brought French influence to insular culture. Because of the effects of conquest, we have little evidence surviving in written English from the twelfth century to indicate how female sexuality was conceptualised. But the circulation of Anglo-Norman and other French literature in Britain became an important element in the development of thinking and feeling. All of the English texts discussed in this essay also exist in French or Anglo-Norman versions, some of which we know were current in the twelfth century, and we can be certain that many of the French narratives of the twelfth century were known to the insular audience. Anglo-Norman texts show awareness of women characters from the *romans d'antiquité* who are active in the pursuit of their loves, in, for example, references to Thisbe and Lavinia in *Amadas et Ydoine* and to Dido in both *Amadas* and *Le Donnei des Amants*.<sup>5</sup> Ovidian materials are re-worked in the presentation and discussion of love as it affects women in the *Lais* of Marie de France, which have their place in the literary history of Britain.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the theological discussion of the significance of the bride-figure in the *Song of Songs*, which is taken to convey spiritual truths about the relationship of the soul with God, probably contributes to an increased general consciousness of women's sexuality. The exploration of this allegory was given wide currency by St Bernard's preaching of a series of sermons on the *Song of Songs* between about 1135 and his death in 1153.<sup>7</sup>

The love literature that circulated in England in the twelfth century contains, alongside the *fin'amors* that inspires a knight to perform nobly for the sake of his lady, an awareness of a dark and disruptive aspect of passion. The *Tristan* of Thomas shows love leading to despair:

Vunt s'en Tristan e Kaherdin  
Dolent e triste lur chemin.  
Ysolt en grant tristur remaint.<sup>8</sup>

(Douce Fragment, lines 481-3)

Tristan and Kaherdin go sadly and sorrowfully on their way. Ysolt remains, in great sorrow.

Some narratives are coloured by the perception of women as particularly inclined to passion rather than reason, and therefore associated with spiritual danger. The Thomas who composed the *Roman de Horn* makes it clear that Horn is rational and rejects *fol amour*, whereas Rigmel is subject to excessive passion and requires to be governed by the better judgement of her lover.<sup>9</sup> The first secular narrative in English which presents women in love relationships is Lazamon's *Brut*, a transitional text produced at the beginning of the thirteenth century and leading from the traditions of Old

English into a new age. Françoise Le Saux recognises in it a consciousness, similar to that in the Tristan story, of love as potentially destructive, and of women as active participants in it. The English poet stresses, for example, the power of love in motivating Guinevere to combine in treachery against Arthur with her lover Mordred, and when she realises finally that circumstances have brought her relationship with her lover to an end, Lazamon focuses sharply on the bitterness of her grief at the loss of love, whereas in his source, the French *Brut* of Wace, the report is of sorrow mingled with a powerful element of shame and a suggestion of repentance.<sup>10</sup>

Although the *Brut* is essentially a chronicle, it contains some of the material out of which romances were generated, and it provides clues about the development of romance. Le Saux detects generally, in Lazamon, a greater awareness of women, and of the theme of love, than exists in the source. Igerne, for example, receives closer attention in the English poem. In the French version Igerne, coveted and deceived by Uther, remains largely a desirable piece of property, and this impression is intensified by the wrathful reaction of her husband Gorlois to Uther's interest in her. Lazamon is interested in the psychological detail of her story; he brings her to life as a loving wife to Gorlois. Wace's *Brut* does not, for instance, contain the detailed account of Igerne's welcome to her supposed lord when Uther comes to her in disguise, including her direct speech:

and þas word seide mid wunsume wurde,  
Wil-cume læuerd monne me leofest. (lines 9491-2)

and said, with gracious words, 'Welcome lord, dearest of men to me.'

Lazamon adds, and stresses, something not said at all in Wace: that Igerne genuinely believes that it is her husband who comes to her bed:

Nu wende Ygerne ful iwis þat hit weoren Gorlois  
þurh neuere nænes cunnes þing no icneou heo Vðer þene king,  
(lines 9506-7)

Now Igerne believed certainly that it was Gorlois; she never recognised King Uther in any way,

and that she refuses to believe Uther when he tells her the truth. Lazamon possesses the ability to deal perceptively and sympathetically with the sexual life of a woman when it suits his purpose (and he is of course concerned to provide Igerne's son Arthur with the best possible heritage).<sup>11</sup> Not all English poets, however, share Lazamon's interest in the subject. The author of *Arthur and Merlin*, treating the same story in the second half of the thirteenth century, uses a method of abbreviating the



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narrative, and accelerating action. In his hands the Igerne material is stripped to the bare essentials, losing the subtlety and delicacy of the related French version in the Vulgate Merlin. The poet records his character's distress, but in a purely perfunctory way:

Sche was bigiled sche wist wel . . .  
Wat for sorwe wat for schame  
Wers was neuer gentil dame.<sup>12</sup> (lines 2576, 2579–80)

She knew well she was deceived . . . What for sorrow, what for shame, a noble lady never fared worse.

In reality in post-Conquest England an upper-class woman's choice of a sexual partner 'was subordinated to questions of land, money, and rank', and it is not surprising that the idea of a woman as an object of exchange between men is reflected in the literature of the thirteenth century.<sup>13</sup> But it is notable that repeatedly the literary texts accommodate some degree of dissatisfaction with the treatment of women as chattels. In *Havelok the Dane*, Goldeborw is treated in this way, and the poet shows her displeasure:

She answered and seyde anan,  
Bi Iesu Crist and Seint Iohan,  
Þat hire sholde noman wedde  
Ne noman bringen to hire bedde  
But he were king or kinges eyr,  
Were he neuere man so fayr.<sup>14</sup> (lines 1112–17)

She answered and said, by Jesus Christ and St John, that no man should marry her, nor any man bring her to bed, unless he were a king or a king's heir, no matter how fair a man he might be.

There is extensive play in *Floris and Blancheflur* with the idea that Blancheflour is traded like a piece of merchandise: characters comment repeatedly on this, and on the fact that merchants have made a profit on her sale. The notion of her as a commodity is imaginatively developed, and exposed to criticism, as the King and Queen first arrange for her to be sold, as a preferable option to killing her (lines 151–2), and later give Floris the gold cup which was part of the exchange, in the hope that he may be able to win her back with it. There is further exploitation of the idea of buying and selling, as Floris gives people gold and silver cups in return for information that helps him in his quest for her (lines 416–20 and 475–80), and still more, when he bribes the porter who guards her prison, with the golden cup for which Blancheflour was sold (lines 687–708).<sup>15</sup> Love is seen to be of infinitely greater value than gold or silver. In the Tristan story women are offered in return for services, and the English version, *Sir Tristrem*, preserves these details. The first Ysoude is to be the reward for slaying the

dragon (lines 1418–19), and later is briefly given away by King Mark to a harper (lines 1827–43). Ysode of Brittany is bestowed on Tristrem in return for his military services (lines 2647–51). Again all of these proposals meet with some expression of dissent from within the text. Ysode of Ireland is fiercely opposed to being given to the steward who claims to have killed the monster (lines 1501–2); Tristan reproves Mark for the transaction with the musician (lines 1851–2); and the marriage of Ysode of Brittany to Tristan is followed by a sympathetic exposure of her emotional vulnerability in an unconsummated union (lines 2865–93).<sup>16</sup>

Although romance narratives are the primary literature in which women's experience of love receives extended attention, some writing in non-narrative English texts of the thirteenth century, using sexual and nuptial imagery as a way of expressing perceptions and ideas about spiritual love, offers insights into the way in which women's sexuality was conceptualised. The author of *Ancrene Wisse*, expounding to his anchoresses the allegory of courtship between Christ and the soul, has the suitor first send messengers and jewels, and then appear in person. He 'shawde hire his feire neb, as þe þe wes of alle men feherest to bihalden' [showed her his fair face, as he who was of all men fairest to behold], and speaks very sweetly, with delightful words. Eventually, in the parable, he shows by knightly deeds that he is worthy of love.<sup>17</sup> The assumption is that a woman will be moved by a combination of physical beauty, eloquence and bravery. The *Love Ron* [Love Rune] of the Franciscan Thomas de Hales, which also makes use of the analogy between sexual and spiritual love, and includes a reference to the story of Tristram as an example of the fragility of earthly love, is broadly in agreement with the *Ancrene Wisse* in its expectations of what women will find desirable. Friar Thomas sets out a precise list of the charms of the 'leofmon':

he is feyr & bryht on heowe  
of glede chere, of mode mylde,  
of lufsum lost, of truste treowe,  
freo of heorte, of wisdom wilde.<sup>18</sup> (lines 91–4)

he is fair and bright-complexioned, cheerful in countenance, gentle in manners, delightful in disposition, trustworthy, noble in heart, perfect in wisdom.

In each of these cases we must assume that the clerical author's theory of female sexual inclinations is coloured by his own view of what would be appropriate and desirable in a virtuous woman. Nevertheless the ideas reflect also an expectation of what a female audience would respond to. In romance treatments of falling in love we find the same emphasis on handsome appearance, pleasant behaviour and courage. The Horn who fills

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Rymenhild with passion is rose-red, white as a flower, bright as glass, fair and also bold (lines 13–18).<sup>19</sup> A combination of good looks with knightly strength and dignity forms the basis of Belisaunt's attraction to Amis in *Amis and Amiloun*: he is 'douhtiest' [bravest], 'worpliest' [most honourable], 'semliest' [handsomest], and fairest (lines 442–54).<sup>20</sup>

In the romances the form of the onset of love in a woman is variable. It may be a sudden visitation, irresistible and irrational, and manifesting itself in a severe form of love-sickness. It may evolve more gradually as a result of companionship and affinity. Rymenhild, in *King Horn*, is stricken with love, apparently abruptly, and is driven almost wild as a result. We hear that everyone loved Horn,

And mest him luvede Rymenhild,  
The kinges owene doghter.  
He was mest in thoghte;  
Heo luvede so Horn child  
That negh heo gan wexe wild. (lines 252–6)

And Rymenhild loved him most, the King's own daughter. He was most in her thought; she loved child Horn so much that she almost went mad.

Her anguish is acute and she sends for him, saying that she is sick (lines 265–78). Her love causes her to weep and to swoon, and when she believes that Horn is dead she contemplates suicide (lines 657–8; 430–2; 1205–10). In *Sir Tristrem* Blauncheffour, the mother of Tristrem, presents a more concentrated picture of the love–suffering–death syndrome. The onset of her love for Rouland, Tristrem's father, is shown as fierce and sudden. It is expressed in terms of wounding and the threat of death, and is given the vividness of direct speech:

Purch min hert wiþ inne  
Ywounded hap he me  
So sone;  
Of bale bot he me blinne  
Mine liif days ben al done. (lines 84–8)

He has wounded me right through the heart; unless he relieves my suffering the days of my life are all done.

Her metaphorical wounding is inextricably bound up with the literal wounding of her beloved, which is related immediately after. This leads, by way of their love-making and the conception of Tristrem, to her dying in childbed after she receives the news that Rouland has been killed (lines 214–31). She becomes, indeed, almost an emblematic figure of the sorrows of love, prefiguring the more long-drawn-out trials that will afflict her son and his lover.

Alternatively, affection may grow as a man and a woman learn to enjoy each other's companionship. The text of *Sir Tristrem* indicates that before they ever drink the potion, the couple find a mutual affinity and pleasure in similar interests. Ysode is first introduced in a sequence of three stanzas in which the poet dwells on the interaction between her and Tristrem during his stay in Ireland, when he instructs her in music and story-telling: she is described as Ysode

Pat gle was lef to here  
And romance to rede arigt.  
Sir Tristrem hir gan lere  
Po wiþ al his miȝt, (lines 1257–60)

who enjoyed listening to music and reading stories. Then Sir Tristrem taught her enthusiastically,

and the foundation is laid for a relationship based on liking and shared tastes. When Tristrem tells Ysode how he has spoken of her to Mark, and thus made him desire her as a wife, a point is also being made about the nature of the relationship that has been built between Tristrem himself and Ysode, so that the drinking of the potion confirms an emotion for which a basis already exists (lines 1607–12). The love between Floris and Blancheflour is similar, in that it develops as a result of companionship, as the two young people grow up together like brother and sister. The onset of their love is not described, because it has always been there:

Be children louyd togeder soo,  
Pey myȝt neuer parte atwoo. (lines 29–30)

The children loved each other so much that they could never part from each other.

But it is not exactly the same as the early stages of the Tristrem–Ysode relationship. The likeness between Floris and Blancheflour is stressed by repeated references to them as a pair, by the use of flower names for both, and the association of both with flowers in the narrative (lines 641–2 and 780, 810), together with the placing of them in parallel situations, as when she is reputedly dead for love, and he, believing the story, wishes to kill himself (lines 281–94). The identification is such that their love becomes, in effect, a search for the missing other part of one's self.<sup>21</sup>

Whether the love is sudden or gradual, the notion is regularly used that the heroine might die as a result of frustration or loss, as when Rymenhild thinks of self-destruction. In some cases the reference to death may be hyperbole, as when Belisaunt tells her mother that the pains of her love-sickness are so severe that she will be 'loken in clay' (lines 491–2). But dying for love slips easily between metaphoric and literal levels of

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discourse. When Floris is told the lie that Blanche flour has died for love of him, he finds it credible enough to be prepared to kill himself in consequence. Ysode is reported to be ready to slay herself when separated from Tristrem (line 2029), and although the final stanzas of this poem are missing, we know that ultimately her love must prove fatal. In each of these cases love is for the heroine something which controls her life, and to which everything else is subordinated.

Love is a major feature of romance plots, and the motivating power of the knight's devotion to his lady is well known. But the woman's love also plays its part in producing action. The story of Goldeborw in *Havelok the Dane* has a different emphasis, because her role is to be a secondary figure in a narrative which is essentially concerned with justice, and the good government of the kingdom. But Ysode, Rymenhild, Blanche flour and Belisaunt are all portrayed as women strong and decisive in the pursuit of love. The most obvious connection between the woman's love and the plot is created when the heroine is assertive in her sexual conduct. In some of the texts the plot turns on the heroine's choice of a man. The woman's exercising of her wishes in the choosing of a sexual partner is an important element of the action of *King Horn*. Rymenhild is utterly direct in her approach to Horn, so much so that she functions almost as a type of the passionate woman. Her assertiveness is combined with the competence to pursue her desire effectively, and she does so apparently without having to obtain authorisation from her father. Being unable to speak to the object of her affections in hall, she arranges for Horn to be brought to her room, and later for him to be knighted, so that the apparent discrepancy between their ranks will be lessened. When the young man is brought to her, she loses no time in making her advances (although they are made to the wrong man because the steward has tricked her and sent Horn's friend Apulf instead):

Heo sette him on bedde;  
Wiþ Apulf child he(o) wedde.  
On hire armes tweie  
Apulf heo gan leie. (lines 299–302)

She placed him on the bed; she revealed her desire to child Apulf. She embraced Apulf in both her arms.

The importance to her of having the right partner is emphasised vividly by the symbolic dream which makes her weep, because a big fish breaks the net and:

'Ihc wene þat ihc schal lose  
þe fiss þat ihc wolde cheose.' (lines 663–4)

I think that I shall lose the fish that I want.

Mary Hynes-Berry has observed that Rymenhild's impetuous, passionate nature is contrasted in the poem with the mature, prudent behaviour of Horn. She is a passionate woman whose story is in the end a happy one because the love between the two, while powerful and lasting, is also kept under control by Horn's capacity for reason.<sup>22</sup>

In *Amis and Amiloun* sexual assertiveness of a different kind is the precipitating factor of the series of crises around which the narrative is constructed. Belisaunt makes advances to the hero Amis, and reacts to his refusal of her, on the ground of their difference in rank, by threatening to accuse him of rape. The 'Potiphar's wife' motif is one that potentially carries strong disapproval for the user of the stratagem, since it is one which leaves the victim with no easy way out of the situation. It accords very naturally with the expression of a strong fear of women, associated with awareness of their sexual power. One early twentieth-century critic was brought almost to silence by the figure of the predatory woman: W. W. Comfort is able to say about examples of the 'forward woman' in the *chansons de geste* only that they

are not attractive morally and could not have existed as a standard in any conceivable state of society. Their characters are interesting only as they show the imagination of the poets drawing away from the primitive type, elaborating the role of woman in modern fiction.<sup>23</sup>

In fact what is most interesting about *Amis and Amiloun* is how little disapproval is incurred by Belisaunt, and how little anxiety about female sexuality is produced in this text. After Belisaunt has trapped Amis into the relationship, the poet reports how she cannot take her eyes off him, and speaks of great love existing between the two; explicit disapproval is directed at the malevolent steward who perceives the situation and betrays them (lines 685–720). Sarah Kay has analysed the values of the *chanson de geste* version of the story, *Ami et Amile*, calling attention to the concern with the relationship between women's sexuality and feudal power, and the emphasis on sexual guilt, and exposing the misogynist ethos of the *chansons de geste* which excludes women, and punishes seductive behaviour by them. Kay points out that in the romance versions, both in Anglo-Norman and in Middle English, there is less evidence of anxiety to punish seduction, and suggests that this is characteristic of a distinction between romance and epic. In fact, since by far the main interest of the English text is in the theme of brotherhood, Belisaunt's behaviour, although a necessary part of the plot, is not a primary concern. The poet is perhaps misogynist by default, since his interest in the woman is confined to her roles as a creator of complications in the narrative, and subsequently as a supportive wife.<sup>24</sup>

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Despite theologians' warnings about the association between women and the sin of concupiscence, at least some of the narratives go beyond tolerance and exhibit an interest in women's sexual pleasure. In *Floris and Blancheflur*, the brother-sister aspect of the relationship, and the youth of the lovers, are held in tension with a strong sense of its sexuality. (Although Floris and Blancheflur are, at twelve, alarmingly young, this is put into perspective by the fact that the Belisaunt who traps Amis into matrimony is only three years older, and Horn also is aged fifteen when he first attracts Rymenhild's attentions). The sly treatment of Blancheflur, oversleeping because she has her lover with her (lines 839-74), and the visualising of the two in bed together, combine with sexual symbolism in the phallic resonances of the tower in the centre of the Emir's garden (lines 567-82), and in the scene where Floris causes consternation by rising upright from concealment in a basket of flowers, in the chamber of the wrong maiden (lines 745-56). The author of *Sir Tristrem* preserves at least something of Thomas's sensitivity to the sexual frustration of Isolt of Brittany. In the handling of the water-splash scene, the language lacks the precision with which Thomas records the coldness of the water against Isolt's thighs, but the poet retains her mocking laugh as the water splashes under her skirt, and her explanation to her brother that it has gone higher than any man has sought to go.<sup>25</sup>

The main focus of love is the pursuit of the object of desire. These romances show that the existence of the love relationship generates situations which require the woman to be active, rather than being confined to the role of passive object of her lover's affections. It tends to be the case that stories present the male lover as having wider contact with the outside world, and, for example, travelling while the woman remains at home. But there is action by the women within the limits of what a reasonable degree of verisimilitude will permit. *Ysoude*, for instance, is a lively and responsive partner to *Tristrem*. In the English version there is a small but significant alteration to the events in that it is *Ysoude*, and not *Tristrem*, who calls for the fatal drink, and she who then gives it to him. In other versions these actions are performed by *Tristan* or a servant.<sup>26</sup> She does not, of course, know the significance of what she does, but the detail contributes something to the total picture of her as an active character. When she thinks it necessary she is ruthless, and indeed murderous when, after substituting *Brengwain* for herself in *Mark's* bed, she attempts to destroy her (lines 1712-82). Her most striking quality is the quick and resourceful thinking with which she responds to extreme danger. On the occasions when she realises that *Mark* is overhearing the meeting in the orchard between her and *Tristrem*, she says for his benefit that:

‘Y loued neuer man wiþ mode  
Bot him þat hadde mi maidenhede.’ (lines 2133–4)

I never loved a man except the one who had my virginity.

Then when she is formally put to the test, she and the disguised Tristrem collude in the casuistic oath:

‘Bot on to schip me bare,  
þe kniȝtes seiȝe wele þan . . .  
So neiȝe com neuer man  
Bot mi lord þe king.’ (lines 2271–2, 2276–7)

Except for one who carried me to the ship, as the knights saw then . . . no man ever came so near me but my lord the king.

The text of *Sir Tristrem* contains no suggestion of criticism of this: the narrator comments, apparently without any indication of irony,

Swete Ysoude haþ sworn  
Hir clene, þat miri may. (lines 2278–9)

Swete Ysoude has sworn herself clean, that merry maid.

Belisaunt shows a similar intelligence in forming the plan with Amis that, in order that they can be defended from the charge of sexual misconduct, Amiloun, who is innocent, will fight in Amis’s place (lines 937–72). In both women, their morally equivocal behaviour is treated on the basis, as Susan Crane has pointed out, that it is an acceptable locus for resistance to social pressure and the safeguarding of personal allegiances.<sup>27</sup> In *Floris and Blancheflur*, the heroine’s scope for action is restricted by her function as the object of Floris’s quest. Nevertheless she is shown as strong and firm. The focus of her effort is on being true to her love, and sacrificing herself if necessary for her beloved. In the critical scene in which each wishes the other to benefit from the power of the magic ring, and thus be saved from death, she functions very much on equal terms with her partner, asserting herself in words and actions just as much as he (lines 954–1027).

In some of the texts the heroine’s relationship with her mother is noted as helping to determine her actions in love, thus producing a sense that women draw on a tradition of female behaviour, from which feminine identities are constructed. Lazamon adds to Wace’s account of Ygerne that she and her mother come of a long line of faithful women (lines 9359–60). The motif of the mother acting along with the daughter is seen in *Sir Tristrem*, in which it is the mother who proves in a practical way, by finding the dragon’s tongue inside Tristrem’s hose, that it was he and not the false steward who killed the dragon. She also possesses the skills to provide the



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magic love potion, and thus she has a conclusive effect on her daughter's destiny. In *Amis and Amiloun* there is a strong indication that Belisaunt's mother assists her to make her approach to Amis. In a series of six stanzas the poet depicts first Belisaunt lying in her bed, sick with love, and her mother coming to ask how she can help her. Then two stanzas tell how Amis stays at home from hunting, and goes into the garden. Next Belisaunt's mother comes to her daughter's room and tells her to rise and go into the garden, and this leads directly to a happy encounter between her and Amis (lines 481–552). The mother's consciousness of what she is doing is implied clearly by the structure of the episode.

The thirteenth-century composers of romances were not all equally interested in love: as we have seen, for the author of *Arthur and Merlin* it is not important, and in *Havelok the Dane* it is a secondary consideration. In the other texts, where it is a major preoccupation, love is not analysed through interior monologue and authorial comment as is done, for example, in the work of Chrétien, or in Thomas's *Tristan*. Nevertheless, in their own ways, the English poets create a sharp awareness of the quality of the love experience, and it is depicted as something in which woman and man participate on equal terms. The pleasure that lovers feel in each others' company is realised, characteristically in a simple fashion, and the texts demonstrate lucidly the connection between emotion and action.

The difference in treatment between *Sir Tristrem* and its source can be ascertained with confidence only for those parts of the poem which correspond to the surviving *Tristan* fragments, but it is clear that the Middle English text is a considerably abbreviated version of the story as it must have appeared in Thomas's complete poem. The scale of treatment is much reduced, to produce a brisk narrative, excluding analysis of inner life and moral commentary. The story is told in something approximating to a ballad mode, in an eleven-line stanza, and on the assumption that the general outline is already known to the audience. As a result of compression, the English text displays some startling changes of mood and attitude. But the rapid alternation between joy and sorrow, highlighted by the repetition of key phrases and lines, creates a rhythmically patterned medium that is actually well suited to a narrative of extreme situations. The lovers' happiness when they flee away together to the forest is expressed as a kind of idyll. As in other versions, *Tristrem* has given to Ysode as a token of his love the dog Peti Crewe – a simplified animal compared with the one we know from Gottfried, without the bell that magically takes away sorrow, but still possessing a coat softer than silk and coloured red, blue and green (line 2399).<sup>28</sup> When the lovers are banished by King Mark, they go to live in a cave made by giants in the old days, which is accessible

to them by a secret entrance, accompanied by Peti Crewe and the hound Hodain (who in this narrative alone among known versions of the story has lapped up some of the love potion). The essentials of this cavern of love exist in other versions, and although we can at best guess at what Thomas wrote about it, we do possess Gottfried's elaborately allegorised version of the grotto of love. By comparison, the *Sir Tristrem* poet handles it with a striking lyric simplicity, depicting a plain life lived by the lovers in the closest possible harmony with the natural world. Without wine or rich food, they live contentedly on well water and the game they take. Words like 'ioie', 'loue', and 'bliþe' are concentrated in the final two lines of the stanzas, confirming the joyous quality of the experience (lines 2452–508).

*King Horn* similarly treats emotion with severe economy. The strength of this poem as a representation of love lies in the success with which symbols are combined with passages of terse dialogue. Helen Cooper has noted the skill with which the ring is used in the poem, *not* as a magic talisman, because the point is that magic is not involved: the ring is a symbol, not a supernatural property. The recognition scene is much more charged with meaning, because it is the power of love signified by the ring, as much as the object itself, that reveals Horn to Rymenhild.<sup>29</sup> The recognition scene is powerful because of the integration into extremely simple poetry of the play on words and symbols. The audience is required to share Rymenhild's mental processes as she tries to decipher the riddle on Horn's name, the allusion to the dream of fish, and the significance of the ring. John M. Ganim has argued persuasively that the most important scenes of the poem are those in which we see 'two people talking, dealing in secrets, disclosures, and reminders. The poem is more about communication than it is about conflict.'<sup>30</sup>

The creation of a sense of the nature of mutual love is accomplished in *Floris and Blancheflur* by the treatment of the events that take place after Floris has found Blancheflour in captivity. The poet skilfully balances words uttered and actions performed by each of the pair, thus building up a sense of the strength and support they give each other in the face of danger. Brief exchanges in direct speech –

'Haue þis ryng, lemman myn;  
þow shalt not dye while it is þyn.'  
Blanchefloure seide þoo:  
'So ne shal it neuer goo,  
þat þis ryng shal help me,  
And þe deed on þe see' (lines 968–73)

'Have this ring, my love; you shall not die while you possess it.' Then Blancheflour said, 'It shall never be that this ring shall help me, while I see death come upon you'

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– are combined with simple reciprocal actions: giving the ring, handing it back, and each trying to restrain the other from moving towards death. Thus in an unobtrusive way the audience is allowed to understand the quality of the experience that Floris and Blancheffleur share.

In the texts under consideration here, despite the suggestion in some of them that women's behaviour is influenced by their mothers, a woman's love is not usually clearly differentiated from that experienced by a man. In *King Horn* there is an apportioning of qualities based on the belief that woman is more subject to passion, and that her emotional intensity requires to be held in check by the rationality of her partner. But otherwise the emphasis is on the two lovers having broadly similar dispositions and emotional experience, even although the plot may allocate a more varied and physically active role to the man. Women weep in the grip of powerful feelings, but the men are also capable of tears. The woman is psychologically as strong as her partner and equally determined in her pursuit of satisfaction. The voices of Ysoude as she angrily rejects the advances of a suitor who hopes to replace Tristrem (lines 3048–69), or of Blancheffleur as she declares to her friend Claris that she will never be untrue to Floris and submit to the Emir (lines 785–94), are not discernibly feminine: the words they use could equally well be used by Tristrem or Floris. Viewed as a group these romances show women's love as sometimes noble and generous, sometimes selfish and destructive. In either case, it is a condition which dominates their lives, making them desire passionately to be united with the object of their affections. It impels them to behave single-mindedly, effectively, and if necessary unscrupulously, to secure and retain the chosen lover. They challenge barriers of rank, and defy social prohibitions, for the sake of their love. Rather than lose it the heroine may be prepared to sacrifice life itself. Little or no attention is paid to religious perspectives on life, and where, in *Sir Tristrem*, passion blatantly conflicts with Christian morality, the intensity of love is its own justification.

The picture that emerges from a consideration of these romances can be only partial, since there is no reason to assume that the narratives which are available to us are representative of those other works which we assume existed but which have not been preserved. Nor can we argue that the literary constructions of women in the thirteenth century reflect opportunities for action and choice open to women in reality.<sup>31</sup> But these texts do indicate that at this time there was some taste for stories that showed women as resourceful, determined, and committed to the pursuit of emotional satisfaction. The reference in *Sir Tristrem* to Ysoude's taste for reading romances (lines 1257–8) is a small piece of evidence that points to female consumption of such narratives, and it would seem at least possible

that the story-tellers were responding to a desire felt by women in their audience, to imagine an autonomy and freedom of action denied them by their actual position in family and society.

## NOTES

- 1 Rudolph C. Bambas, 'Another View of the Old English *Wife's Lament*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 62 (1963), 303-9. *The Wife's Lament* is printed in G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie (eds.), *The Exeter Book, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, III (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1966), pp. 210-11.
- 2 G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie (eds.), *The Exeter Book, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, III, p. 180. (This, and all subsequent translations, are my own.)
- 3 Discussed in F. J. E. Raby, *A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages*, I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), pp. 291-306.
- 4 Clifford Davidson, 'Erotic "Women's Songs" in Anglo-Saxon England', *Neophilologus* 59 (1975), 451-62. See also Patricia A. Belanoff, 'Women's Songs, Women's Language: *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*', in Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessy Olsen (eds.), *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 193-203.
- 5 For the behaviour of women as lovers in the *romans d'antiquité* see Rosemarie Jones, *The Theme of Love in the Romans d'Antiquité*, MHRA Dissertation Series 5 (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1972). For references in Anglo-Norman texts of the late twelfth century to figures appearing in the *romans d'antiquité* see M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 113, 130.
- 6 For Marie's use of Ovidian materials see Paula Clifford, *Marie de France: Lais* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1982), pp. 24-5. There is an explicit reference to 'Le livre Ovide', identified as the *Remedia amoris*, in *Guigemar*: see A. Ewert (ed.), *Marie de France: Lais* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960), p. 167.
- 7 Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in Cantica Cantorum*, J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, CLXXXIII, 785-1198. The twelfth-century interest in the *Song of Songs* is discussed in Cedric E. Pickford (ed.), *The Song of Songs. A Twelfth-Century French Version* (Oxford: published for the University of Hull by Oxford University Press, 1974), Introduction, pp. ix-xxxvi.
- 8 Bartina H. Wind (ed.), *Les Fragments du Roman de Tristan* (Paris and Geneva: Droz, 1960), p. 105.
- 9 J. D. Burnley, 'The "Roman de Horn"', *French Studies* 32 (1978), 385-97, p. 386. For the association between women and passion see also below, Jennifer Fellows, 'Mothers in Middle English Romance', p. 42.
- 10 W. R. J. Barron and Françoise Le Saux, 'Two Aspects of Lazamon's Narrative Art', *Arthurian Literature* 9 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), pp. 25-56. Where Wace relates of the queen

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An pansé fu et an tristor;  
 Manbra li de la vilenie  
 Que por Mordret s' estoit honie  
 Le bon roi avoit vergondé  
 Et son neveu Mordret amé,

(lines 13206–10)

she was melancholy and sad; she called to mind the disgrace that she had brought shame on herself for Mordred, had dishonoured the good king and loved his nephew Mordred,

the stress in *Lazamon's Brut* is on her sorrow for her lost love:

Þa quene læi inne Eouwerwic næs heo næwere swa sarlic.  
 Þat wes Wenhauer þa quene særgest wimmonne . . .  
 Wa wes hire þere while þat heo wes on life.

(lines 14203–4, 14207)

The queen was in York; she was never so sorrowful. That was Guinevere the queen, saddest of women . . . She was unhappy the rest of her life.

Wace is quoted from I. Arnold (ed.), *Roman de Brut*, SATF (Paris 1938, 1940). *Lazamon* is quoted here and subsequently from G. L. Brook and R. F. Leslie (eds.), *Lazamon: Brut*, 2 vols. EETS OS 250, 277 (1963, 1978).

- 11 Rosemary Morris analyses *Lazamon's* treatment of the story in 'Uther and Igerne: A Study in Uncourtly Love', *Arthurian Literature* 4 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1985), 70–92. See also the discussion of *Lazamon's* delicate and dignified treatment of female characters in Rosamund Allen, 'Female Perspectives in Romance and History', in Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows and Carol M. Meale (eds.), *Romance in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), pp. 133–47.
- 12 Quoted from O. D. Macrae-Gibson (ed.), *Of Arthour and of Merlin*, 2 vols. EETS OS 268, 279 (1973, 1979). See especially Introduction, II, p. 34.
- 13 Cecily Clark, 'After 1066: The Factual Evidence' in Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p. 152. See also, on the erosion of women's freedoms and rights in post-Conquest England, Judith Weiss, 'The Power and the Weakness of Women in Anglo-Norman Romance', above pp. 7–8.
- 14 Quoted from G. V. Smithers (ed.), *Havelok* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).
- 15 Quoted here and subsequently from F. C. de Vries (ed.), *Floris and Blauncheflur* (Groningen: Drukkerij V R B, 1966). Quotations are taken from the text of the Egerton MS, and all line references are also to this MS.
- 16 Line references, and subsequent quotations, are taken from George P. McNeill (ed.), *Sir Tristrem*, STS 8 (1885–6). McNeill gives the heroine's name as Ysonde. In the MS *n* and *u* are usually indistinguishable, and I follow Michael Swanton, *English Literature before Chaucer* (London: Longman, 1987), pp. 203–14, in deciding that 'Ysoude' is more likely to be the correct reading.
- 17 Mabel Day (ed.), *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe*, edited from Cotton MS Nero A. xiv, EETS OS 225 (1952), p. 177, lines 19–20. For a recent discussion

- of the application of secular concepts to the religious instruction in this text, see Elizabeth Robertson, 'The Rule of the Body: The Feminine Spirituality of the *Ancrene Wisse*', in Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley (eds.), *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), pp. 109-34.
- 18 Carleton Brown (ed.), *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), pp. 68-76.
  - 19 Quoted here and subsequently from Joseph Hall (ed.), *King Horn* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901). The reading of the Cambridge MS is normally used.
  - 20 Quoted here and subsequently from MacEdward Leach (ed.), *Amis and Amiloun*, EETS OS 203 (1937 for 1935).
  - 21 Joan Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature from the Twelfth Century to Dante* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 77-8, calls attention to the extent to which in the French *Floire et Blanchefleur*, which is a related text, the heroine is a mirror image of the hero.
  - 22 Mary Hynes-Berry, 'Cohesion in *King Horn* and *Sir Orfeo*', *Speculum* 50 (1975), 652-70. Cf. the discussion of the Anglo-Norman *Horn* by Judith Weiss in 'The Wooing Woman in Anglo-Norman Romance', in Mills, Fellows and Meale, (eds.), *Romance In Medieval England*, pp. 149-61.
  - 23 W. W. Comfort, 'Types in the Chansons de Geste', *PMLA* 21 (1906), 279-434, p. 379.
  - 24 Sarah Kay, 'Seduction and Suppression in *Ami et Amile*', *French Studies* 44 (1990), 129-42.
  - 25 *Les Fragments du Roman de Tristan*, ed. Wind, Fragment de Turin, lines 216-27, 246-56. *Sir Tristrem*, lines 2865-93.
  - 26 In Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*, and in the Icelandic saga version of the story, Tristan calls for the drink, and then gives it to Isolt/Isönd. See Wolfgang Spiewok (ed.), *Das Tristan-Epos Gottfrieds von Strassburg* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1989), lines 11,666-85, and Paul Schach (trans.), *The Saga of Tristram and Isönd* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), chapter XLVI.
  - 27 Susan Crane, *Insular Romance* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 123-4.
  - 28 *Das Tristan-Epos*, ed. Spiewok, lines 15,791-904. Gottfried's Petitcreiu is a tiny magic dog from Avalon, many-coloured and equipped with a bell, the sound of which banishes all sorrows.
  - 29 Helen Cooper, 'Magic That Does Not Work', *Medievalia et Humanistica* new series 7 (1976), 131-46, pp. 135-7.
  - 30 John M. Ganim, *Style and Consciousness in Middle English Narrative* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 41-2.
  - 31 See Cecily Clark, 'After 1066: The Factual Evidence', and Christopher Brooke, *The Mediaeval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 152-7.

## Mothers in Middle English romance

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The relationship between mothers and their children is one which has received surprisingly little explicit literary treatment even in a post-Freudian age so acutely conscious of its crucial formative importance. Issues of familial relationships, however, inform the underlying structure of many folk- and fairy-tales, as the late Bruno Bettelheim in particular has demonstrated,<sup>1</sup> and at this less than fully articulated, less than fully conscious level are common to the literatures of all ages and of all cultures.

While at first sight Middle English romance appears to have rather little to say about parent-child relationships, on closer examination a preoccupation with such issues will be seen to constitute an important element determining the underlying structure of many of these narratives. In this respect they are akin to traditional stories, with which they also share many surface motifs. My purpose in this essay is to examine the attitudes towards mothers and motherhood either implicit or explicit in the Middle English romances and, by viewing them in relation to attitudes to the maternal role expressed in non-narrative medieval literature, to try to determine how far a distinctively medieval view of motherhood can be inferred from the way in which the romances handle traditional motifs and story-patterns.

Perhaps the most extreme expression of medieval ambivalence towards motherhood comes, somewhat ironically, from the pen of a woman. In the sixtieth chapter of her *Revelation*, Julian of Norwich writes:

Thys feyer louely worde: Moder, it is so swete and so kynde in it selfe that it may not verely be seyde of none ne to none but of hym and to hym that is very mother of lyfe and of alle. To the properte of moderhede longyth kynd, loue, wysdom and knowyng, and it is god.<sup>2</sup>

Julian at once both idealises the maternal role and, by implication, denies any relation between the ideal and the actual. True motherhood is seen as the attribute not of those imperfect beings from whom it takes its name, but of one who is both Son and spiritual Father.

Neither the attribution of maternal characteristics to the deity nor ambivalence towards actual mothers is by any means peculiar to or new with Julian of Norwich. Caroline Walker Bynum has traced the growth of the use of maternal imagery in twelfth-century spiritual writings, notably in the work of Bernard of Clairvaux, to describe both the nature of God and the role of prelates with respect to the souls in their charge.<sup>3</sup> She notes, however, that these positive images of motherhood bear no necessary relation to a positive role for women in society, and that religious writing of the period shows at least as much hostility towards actual mothers as it does romanticisation of their maternal function;<sup>4</sup> after all, it came from the pens of those who had renounced their earthly families. The growing veneration accorded to the Virgin Mary from the twelfth century onwards, while contributing to the growth of maternal imagery in medieval religious writing and to the idealisation of motherhood in the abstract, seems to have had little effect on attitudes towards actual mothers in the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, both the positive and the negative attitudes towards mothers, and towards women more generally, expressed in the spiritual writings of the Middle Ages owe a good deal more to *auctoritee*, both Scriptural and classical, than they can be assumed to owe to experience; and their diverse, sometimes rather contradictory, nature can be accounted for in large part by the variety of interpretations of Scripture offered in patristic exegesis (particularly with regard to the apportionment of blame for the Fall of Man), as well as by the coming together of traditions of very different origins. Thus the bearing of children was seen both as woman's punishment for Eve's transgression and as her means to salvation;<sup>6</sup> woman was created in order to propagate the human race, yet, according to an extremely influential tradition of ultimately Platonic provenance, she was in no real sense a parent to a child, at best playing a secondary, passive role.<sup>7</sup> The contradictions among these views are not total, and there is nothing in them inconsistent with the more-or-less universally held opinion that a woman's role, maternally as well as uxorially, is and should be a passive one.<sup>8</sup> Another view in which there seems to have been virtual unanimity is that woman is a more physical being than man – that male and female represent, respectively, reason and sensuality.<sup>9</sup> Woman's grosser physical nature is evidenced in the more obvious manifestations of her sexuality – her ability to bear children, and the related function of menstruation. Notions of uncleanness were associated with both these functions,<sup>10</sup> and it is no doubt partly on account of such notions that – despite what St Paul has to say as to woman's salvation through motherhood, or Ambrose as to her having been created to perpetuate the species<sup>11</sup> – such a high value was placed in the Middle Ages upon virginity. The gruesome account of the



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horrors of pregnancy and childbirth given in the thirteenth-century treatise on virginity *Hali Meiðhad* would certainly appear to suggest that such is the case.<sup>12</sup> Yet conjugal fidelity was seen as the next most desirable state for those unable to aspire to virginal perfection, and the chief end of marriage (and the primary justification for all sexual activity) was considered to be procreation.<sup>13</sup>

Whatever the theoretical views of motherhood current in the Middle Ages – and they appear to have been compounded of envy, squeamishness, a tendency towards idealisation and, naturally, acceptance of the inevitability and necessity of procreation – in the sphere of parenthood, as in others, women's freedoms were significantly curtailed by the advent of feudalism with the Norman conquerors.<sup>14</sup> Women were able to exercise little control with regard to their children, and among the upper classes often did not fulfil even those most basic functions of nurture and protection upon which such emphasis is placed in the maternal imagery of the mystics and Church Fathers: their children were suckled by wet-nurses and often reared away from the parental home from an early age.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the importance in feudal society of securing the patrimony led to increased emphasis upon patrilineal ties and, it would seem, a concomitant marginalisation of the lives and interests of the female line.<sup>16</sup> Daughters, indeed, brought disgrace by reflecting on their fathers' virility,<sup>17</sup> and seem to have been useful primarily for the forging of dynastic links between families.<sup>18</sup> The practice of betrothing children at very tender ages was therefore common, particularly in the fifteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Ann S. Haskell claims: 'No child of either sex seems to have been taken seriously until he reached an age which demonstrated his likelihood of becoming an adult, and parental fear of insufficient corporal punishment seems to have been matched by fear of displaying affection', and she goes on to describe relationships with daughters, whose cardinal virtue consisted in obedience, as being essentially the same as those with servants.<sup>20</sup> It remains to be seen how far these actualities, as well as the more theoretical medieval notions with regard to maternity, are reflected or endorsed in the Middle English romances.

The vast majority of Middle English romances give some account of the protagonist's *enfances*, and often of his/her conception and/or birth. When mothers appear in these narratives at all, therefore, they are usually introduced at the beginning of the story and have some crucial role, whether active or passive, to play in the events that precipitate the main action.

Broadly speaking, the more active the mother's part, at least in the initiation of events, the more likely she is to be in some degree the villain of

the piece and eventually to meet with some sort of judgement or retribution. At one end of the scale there are those 'calumniated wives' (Florence in *Octavian*, Margaret in *Tryamour*, Bellyssant in *Valentine and Orson*) who, like the eponymous heroine of *Emaré*,<sup>21</sup> are the victims of envy or malice and, through no fault of their own, are driven into exile either just before or just after the birth of their children, and who may or may not subsequently be separated from them. At the other extreme is Bevis of Hampton's mother, who, having arranged the death of her husband and failed to arrange that of her son, has the latter sold into slavery. Occupying a greyer area between these two extremes are the mothers of those children who are conceived out of wedlock or whose births involve some other sort of 'irregularity': Freine, Degaré, Degrebelle (in *Sir Eglamour of Artois*) and the two sons of Torrent of Portyngale.

The most positive representations of the maternal role in Middle English romance are to be found in the 'calumniated wife' group of stories. These may be grouped under the heading 'family-based romance'<sup>22</sup> with *Sir Isumbras*, *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, *Torrent of Portyngale* and the second part of *Bevis of Hampton*, yet they differ from those others in their emphasis upon specifically maternal virtues and emotions; it is in relation to their children that these women attain individuality and moral stature, and that they display a more than merely passive virtue. In *Octavian*, the Empress Florence is falsely accused of adultery by her wicked mother-in-law and condemned to be burned at the stake with her two newborn sons. Her reaction is passive acquiescence as regards herself but an impassioned plea, which is also a prayer to Jesus and his mother, not that her children's temporal lives should be spared, but that they should not be denied the chance of eternal salvation:

The lady sawe no bettur redd  
 But that sche schulde be dedd  
 That day vpon the fylde.  
 Wyth sory hert, the sothe to telle,  
 Before þe emperowre on kneys sche felle  
 And bothe hur hondys vphelde.  
 'Grawnt me, lorde, for Jhesu sake  
 Oon oryson that y may make  
 To hym that all may welde,  
 And sythen on me do yowre wyll:  
 What dethe þat ye wyll put me tyll,  
 Therto y wyll me zelde.'

The lady on hur kneys hur sett,  
 To Jhesu Cryste full sore sche wepte:

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What wondur was hyt þogh she were woo.  
'Jhesu,' sche seyde, 'kyng of blysse,  
Thys day thou me rede and wysse,  
And heuene qwene alsoo.  
Mary, mayden and modur free,  
My preyer wyll y make to thee  
For my chyldren twoo;  
As thou lett them be borne of mee,  
Grawnt that they may crystenyd bee,  
To dethe or that they goo.' (lines 241–64, Cambridge text)<sup>23</sup>

Her prayer is the more effective for its economy and restraint and its conspicuous lack of sentimentality. It moves her husband, the Emperor Octavian, to transmute her sentence, and she and her children are driven out into the forest. Like many a romance heroine before and after her, she loses her sons to wild beasts, one being carried off by an ape, the other by a lioness. Subsequently, when the ship that she has taken to the Holy Land stops to water, the shipmen discover the child Octavian in the lioness's den, and Florence insists on being put ashore. The courage of her maternal love, which imparts to her a strength and dignity which even the lioness recognises and respects, is tellingly contrasted with the shipmen's almost farcical terror:

To londe allone the lady yode:  
Sore wepeyd the schypman than.

When sche came on the roche on hyght,  
Sche ranne whyll sche myght,  
Wyth full sory mode.  
The lyenas, thorow Goddys grace,  
When sche sye the ladyes face,  
Debonerly styлле sche stode.  
Thorow the myght of Mary mylde  
Sche suffurd hur to take vp þe chylde,  
And wyth the lady to þe see she yode.  
When þe schypmen þe lyenas sye,  
The londe durste þey not come nye:  
For feere they were nye wode.

Some hente an oore and some a sprytt  
The lyenas for to meete,  
Owt of ther schyppe to were.  
The lady ynto the schyp wente,  
Thyrty fote the lyenas aftur sprete,  
Ther durste no man hur yn bere.  
There men myght game see,

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Fowrty men lepe ynto the see,  
So ferde of the lyenas they were.

(lines 455–77, Cambridge text)

Thereafter, as the narrative focus shifts to the doings of the two sons, Florence fades into the background. She speaks only once more in the romance – at her reunion and reconciliation with her husband; again her preoccupation is with her sons, and whereas the Emperor Octavian had earlier recognised Florent for his son through the account given of the circumstances of his discovery and rescue, Florence's recognition of him is more instinctive:

Lorde, yn all þe sorow þat me was wroght,  
Thyn own sone haue y wyth me broght  
And keypyd hym wyth me.  
Thyn odor sone yn a foreste  
Was takyn wyth a wylde beste,  
That was ferly feyre and fre.  
I wot hyt ys Godys grace,  
I knowe hym be hys face:  
Hyt ys þat yong knyght by the.

(lines 1675–83, Cambridge text)

As will be seen, other romances dealing with the separation of mother and sons present more threatening situations, notably the danger of incest; and it would seem that, below the surface, these stories are dramatising oedipal tensions within the family and the young hero's need to define his identity both independently of and in relation to his parents. Florence, who is anyway separated from only one of her sons for any length of time, is seen in no such threatening light. The positive presentation of her maternal role, strengthened as it is by repeated invocations and references to Mary the mother of Jesus (lines 259, 319, 463, Cambridge text; 742, 1631, Lincoln text), makes her one of the most attractive and sympathetic of romance mothers.<sup>24</sup>

The role of Emaré in the romance that bears her name is less exclusively that of a mother, but she too represents motherhood in positive aspects. When she and her infant son are set adrift through the machinations of her mother-in-law, we are given a brief but touching vignette of maternal tenderness, which stands in contrast to the harshness of their plight as represented by the roughness of the sea, and which enables her to offer comfort to her child despite her own fear:

She was aferde of the see  
And layde her gruf uponn a tre,

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The chylde to her pappes.  
The waves that were grete and strong  
On the bote faste they thonge,  
Wyth mony unsemely rappes.

And when the chyld gan to wepe  
Wyth sory herte she songe hyt aslepe,  
And putte the pappe yn hys mowth. (lines 655–63)<sup>25</sup>

Subsequently, Emaré is responsible for her son Segramour's upbringing, and it is because she has 'taughte [him] nortowre' to such good effect that he is able to effect her eventual reconciliation with her husband (lines 727–41, 841–936).

A somewhat similar pattern is followed initially in *Sir Tryamour*: we have a short scene of tenderness between mother and child, this time emphasising the comfort that the mother derives from the relationship, followed by an account of their rescue and of Margaret's education of the young Tryamour (lines 413–14, 646–5).<sup>26</sup> Since, however, he, not she, is the protagonist of this romance, less importance is attached to the fruits of her maternal devotion, and more to those of the young man's own prowess, than in *Emaré*.

The romances discussed so far make very little emotional capital out of the mother–child relationship, and in fact in *Emaré* we hear at least as much about the father's feelings as we do about the mother's (see lines 811–13, 877–82).<sup>27</sup> In *Valentine and Orson*, by contrast, the emotional content of the scenes involving Bellyssant and her children receives much greater emphasis. The pathos of the scene in which she loses the newborn Orson to a bear is brought out partly in the vocabulary used, partly in the author's comment on and sympathy with her plight:

Then was the gracious lady sorowfull & not without a cause, for the perdition of her chylde, and began for to crye with a feable voyce muche pyteously. And vpon bothe her fete & handes she wente after the beer in the forest, that was anone out of her syght. Alas to lytle auayled her the pursuyte. For she shal neuer se her chyld vnto the tyme that by myracle he be yelded vnto her agayne. So longe went the lady through the forest wepyng for her child, and trauaylled her so sore to goo after, that a stronge sicknes toke her, in suche wise that she fel in a swoune vpon the colde earth as it had bene a dead woman. (p. 34)<sup>28</sup>

When by miracle her sons are yielded unto her again, the scene is milked for emotion in which the sons as much as their mother are involved:

And when they were entred in to the chambre where as the twoo sorowfull ladies was, they went towarde their mother that myght not speake one worde but fel vnto

the earth in a swowne, and the fayre Clerymonde sayde vnto Valentyne pyteouslye. Alas knyght it is your mother that for the loue of you is fallen in a swowne. Then Valentyne embraced her and toke her vp, and Orson colled her betwene his armes in saying to her. Swete mother alas speake vnto me, and then kissed her whiche myght speake neuer a worde, and they were all thre so profoundly smyten to the harte with pyte that they fel vnto the earth in a swowne and lay there a great whyle.

(p. 152)

The whole style of this French-derived, fifteenth-century prose romance is, of course, more prolix than that of the earlier verse romances so far discussed; but it would seem too that the amount of explicit emphasis given to maternal emotions is in inverse proportion to the degree of the mother's positive activity in relation to her children. Whereas in *Octavian* Florence expresses her love for her sons in action but says little (and has little said for her by the author) as to her emotions, Bellyssant, who does very little, at least shows that her maternal feelings are intact by weeping and swooning at appropriate moments. Emaré and Margaret stand somewhere between these two, both as to displays of emotion and as to the degree to which their roles are active ones.

All these stories are concerned to a greater or lesser extent with the separation of father and son(s) and with the struggles of the latter to restore the *status quo*. In the working out of this theme the narrative function performed by the 'calumniated wife' motif may be fulfilled by other forms of 'irregular birth',<sup>29</sup> for example where the children are born out of wedlock.

*Eglamour*, *Torrent of Portyngale*, *Degaré* and *Generydes* all concern heroes so born, but there is considerable variety among them in the way this motif is handled. All display a good deal of sympathy towards the unmarried mothers involved, and all go to some lengths to make excuses for them. Both *Torrent* and *Eglamour* (whose stories are closely related in many ways) win their ladies by performing tasks set by the ladies' fathers, and both beget sons before marriage has taken place and then disappear overseas, where they are unavoidably detained for the next twelve months. In the meantime Cristabelle bears *Eglamour*'s son and *Desonelle* gives birth to twins; both women are set adrift with their children by their angry fathers. In *Eglamour*, the fact that a formal troth-plight has been uttered by *Eglamour* and *Cristabelle* removes much of the moral stigma potentially attaching to the boy's birth, and it is probably the case that 'a medieval audience would be united against [*Cristabelle*'s father] when he calls her child a bastard'.<sup>30</sup> *Cristabelle* thus in a way combines the role of unmarried mother with that of calumniated wife. In *Torrent*, it is, interestingly, *Desonelle*'s own mother who makes excuses for her and tries to appease the

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king's anger. She succeeds in persuading him not to drive his daughter out until after her confinement, shrewdly appealing to the values by which he himself is motivated:

The quene, her moder, on knees fell,  
'For Iesu is love, that harood hell,  
Lord, haue mercy on me!  
That ylke dede, that she hath done,  
It was with an Erlis sonne,  
Riche man i-nough is he;  
And yf ye wyll not let her lyve,  
Right of lond ye her yeve,  
Till she delyuerd be!' (lines 1798–1806)<sup>31</sup>

Sympathy for Desonelle's plight is also expressed both in the author's own voice and in his depiction of the reactions of the onlookers when she is finally set adrift:

Gret ruth it was to se,  
Whan they led that lady free  
Oute of her faders lond.  
The quene wexid tho nere wood  
For her doughter, that gentill fode,  
And knyghtis stode wepand . . .  
Whan they had shyped that lady ying,  
An hunderid fell in sownyng  
At Peron on the sond. (lines 1819–30)

We are clearly intended to sympathise with her and not to blame her overmuch; though the very fact that the narrative steers us so firmly in this direction, while making no comment on Torrent's conduct, either to blame or to excuse it, highlights the element of sexual discrimination in medieval (as well as much later) attitudes towards illegitimate birth.

In *Degaré*, the hero is born out of wedlock and exposed at birth by his mother. The story, however, enlists our sympathy for her plight in various ways: first, she is the innocent and defenceless victim of rape by a fairy knight; secondly, her fear and anxiety when she finds herself pregnant are as much on her father's account as on her own:

Ich have ever ȝete ben meke and milde;  
Lo, now ich am wiȝ quike childe.  
Ȝif any man hit underȝete,  
Men wolde sai bi sti and strete  
Ȝat mi fader ȝe king hit wan;  
And I ne was nevere aqeint wiȝ man.  
And ȝif he hit him selve wite,

Swich sorewe schal to him smite  
 Pat never blipe schal he be,  
 For al his joie is in me.

(lines 165–74)<sup>32</sup>

Thirdly, although she feels she has no choice but to dispose of the child, she does all she can to ensure his subsequent well-being, both temporal and spiritual (lines 189–91, 205–8). Though not in quite the same category of wronged innocence as a calumniated wife, she is seen more as an unwilling, and largely passive, agent of familial separation than as actively, and therefore culpably, instrumental in it.

The treatment of Generydes' mother, Sereyne, is more neutral. The quasi-supernatural elements in the circumstances surrounding Generydes' conception (lines 57ff.), clumsily handled as they are,<sup>33</sup> are perhaps intended to extenuate her conduct, although she effectively seduces Aufreus. Thereafter, as the boy is brought up first by a washerwoman and then in Sereyne's own court, no comment is passed; nor does Generydes himself offer any adverse criticism upon learning that she is his mother. In fact, he appears singularly unmoved by this intelligence, his attention turning immediately to his father and a wish to travel to his court (lines 323–9).

Because an illegitimate son has legally no father, and certainly no patrimonial rights, it is necessary to the working out of the patrilineal themes of these romances, as well as to the hero's establishment of his own identity, that he should find his father and define his relationship with him.<sup>34</sup> This definition often takes the form of battle between father and son, each being unaware of the other's identity.<sup>35</sup> Where a son is also separated from his mother from infancy, his relationship with her too must be rediscovered and redefined. Here the threat of mother–son incest sometimes arises. This is, of course, both an ancient and a long-enduring narrative motif, appearing in some form or other in works as diverse as *Oedipus*, *Tom Jones* and *The Marriage of Figaro*. At one level, therefore, it can be seen as symptomatic of the primitive origins of the traditional stories that lie behind (or under) the Middle English romances; at another level, nearer to the surface, it embodies a more specifically medieval concern with the definition of a son's rights in relation to those of his father in a patriarchal society.

In *Eglamour*, the hero's son Degrebelle wins his mother's hand in a joust and marries her, only to discover the truth of his relationship to her and to have her won from him in turn by his own father (lines 1237ff., Lincoln text). Stephen Knight draws attention to this episode as 'the mechanism of a dark threat inside the family itself'.<sup>36</sup> Here the oedipal tensions are resolved in the fight between father and son, and the mother's role, though necessary, is essentially neutral. More disturbing in a way is the handling of



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the incest motif in *Degaré*, where the hero's mother seems almost to invite the danger of incest by leaving with her baby son a pair of gloves which only she can wear and the injunction that he should love no woman but her whose hands they fit (lines 194–9, 212–18). Many years later *Degaré* competes successfully in a joust for her hand and marries her. In the nick of time their relationship is discovered through the gloves, which thus operate also as the means by which incest is averted. The ambivalence of the glove motif, which is never fully rationalised or explained, suggests ambivalence towards the mother figure and an awareness, albeit not clearly articulated, of the darker and more threatening aspects of maternity.

As Julie Burton points out in her discussion of this motif, 'Degaré's mother shows an unwillingness to consider her son in relation to any other woman but herself . . . The lines [in which she instructs the finder of her son with regard to the gloves] suggest the danger of future incest between mother and son as well as her reluctance to "lose" her son's love to another woman.'<sup>37</sup> Such possessive maternal love is implicitly criticised even when it takes the more laudable form of over-protectiveness towards a son. The heroes of both *Sir Perceval of Galles* and *Lybeaus Desconus* are brought up by their mothers in seclusion from the world and in ignorance of knightly doings. In *Perceval* the contrast between this and the patriarchal ethos is clearly brought out, for we hear a good deal about Perceval's father's chivalric prowess and his wish that 'his sone were gette / In þe same wonne' (lines 119–20).<sup>38</sup> When the elder Perceval is killed, however, his wife Ache flour takes an oath:

þat scho schall neuer mare wone  
In stede, with hir zonge sone,  
þer dedez of armeȝ schall be done,  
By nyghte ne be daye;  
Bot in þe wodde schall he be:  
Sall he no thyng see  
Bot þe leues of the tree  
And þe greues graye;  
Schall he nowþer take tent  
To justez ne to tournament,  
Bot in þe wilde wodde went,  
With bestez to playe. (lines 165–76)

Yet she is also instrumental in bringing about her son's return to the world, since it is when she instructs him in the rudiments of Christianity that he sets out to seek God and encounters chivalry in the process (lines 233–60). Eventually, having proved himself in the world of patriarchal values, Perceval returns to the woods to rescue his mother and carry her back with him into that world (lines 2117–40).<sup>39</sup> In *Lybeaus*, by contrast, the mother's

role does not go beyond the minimum requirements of her narrative function in keeping him from the world, and even her reasons for doing that seem somewhat confused – a not wholly successful attempt to provide some rationalisation of the actions that the narrative pattern requires of her:

His moder hym kepte with hir myght  
 That he shulde se no knyght  
 J-armed in no maner,  
 For he was full savage  
 And gladly wold do oute-rage  
 To his ffellaves in fere;  
 And all for dred of wycke loose  
 His moder alway kepte him close  
 As dugthy childe and dere. (lines 16–24, Lambeth text)<sup>40</sup>

Once Lybeaus has gone out into the world, we hear no more of his mother.

It is probably significant that where the hero is irreversibly separated from his father by the latter's death, the relationship with his mother tends to come round full circle:<sup>41</sup> this occurs in *Perceval*, in *King Horn* – where, at the end of the romance, Horn seeks out his mother, who has spent most of the period of the action in self-imposed seclusion, praying for her son's safety (lines 67–80, 1359–84)<sup>42</sup> – and, in a very different way, in *Sir Bevis of Hampton*. It is in *Bevis* that the mother is seen most explicitly as a threat to patriarchal values. Bevis's mother has been married to the elderly Guy, earl of Southampton, against her will, and arranges his death at the hands of her lover, the Emperor of Almayne. Bevis denounces her, in strong language for a seven-year-old, and swears vengeance:

Allas, moder, þe faire ble!  
 Euel be-comeþ þe houre to be,  
 To holde bordel.  
 And alle wif-houren, for þe sake –  
 Þe deuел of helle ich hem be-take,  
 Flesch and fel!

'Ac oþing, moder, I schel þe swere:  
 Ȝif ich euer armes bere,  
 And ben of elde,  
 Al þat haþ me fader islawe,  
 And ibrouȝt of is lif-dawe,  
 Ich schel hem ȝilden! (lines 328–39, Auchinleck text)<sup>43</sup>

His mother then orders Bevis's 'meister', Saber, to kill the boy and, when she discovers that she has been deceived as to his death, has her son sold into slavery. Bevis, of course, finally returns to oust his wicked stepfather,

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avenge his father and reclaim his patrimony. The theme of revenge and return to the patrilineal *status quo* shapes this first part of the romance, the true climax of which is the death of the hero's mother. As the Cambridge text tells us when she falls to her own death in grief at that of her husband:

Befyse was as gladde, or gladder,  
Of hys dame as of hys stepfadir.

(lines 4326–7, Cambridge text)

Although the countess emerges as a powerful and threatening presence, there is a certain lack of sureness in the poet's handling of the episodes that concern her. The romance starts with an account of Guy and his prowess and soon launches into what looks as though it is going to be conventional criticism of his desire in old age for marriage to a young and beautiful woman. In mid-stanza, however, the viewpoint changes so that Guy is cast as victim:

Whan he was fallen in-to elde,  
þat he ne miȝte him-self welde,  
He wolde a wif take.  
Sone þar-after, ich vnderstonde,  
Him hadde be leuer þan al þis londe,  
Hadde he hire for-sake.

A nelde a wif he tok anhonde –  
þe Kinges douȝter of Scotlonde,  
So faire and briȝt.  
Allas, þat he hire euer ches!  
For hire loue his lif a les,  
Wiþ mechel vnriȝt.

(lines 25–36, Auchinleck text)

Later, there are narrative anomalies with regard to the countess's role: the fact, for instance, that she orders that her son be killed and *then* that he be sold to passing merchants. Her scheming, libidinous and ruthless character is developed well beyond the needs, either narrative or thematic, of the story, and one is finally left feeling that what we have here is a kind of gratuitous misogyny which actually says rather little, except on the very surface of the narrative, about the maternal role as such.<sup>44</sup>

*Bevis* is, by and large, a pretty misogynistic text: 'Wykkyd be women for to fonde!', generalises the hero (line 611, Cambridge text). Even the pagan princess Josian, whom *Bevis* eventually marries, is not treated with any marked sympathy either by the narrator or by *Bevis* himself. She inhabits an almost entirely male world, in which even her confidant is a man (lines 1280–5, 2888ff.); and her actions, including murder of one of *her* husbands (lines 4006–43) are justified by their *Bevis*-centredness, though his attitude

towards her is, much of the time, cavalier and dismissive. The treatment of the hero's mother, then, seems to be part and parcel of a more general male-centred, anti-feminist ethos in the romance.

In the second part of the story, Josian herself takes on the role of mother. Like some of the calumniated wives discussed earlier, she gives birth to twins in the forest and is almost immediately separated from them – though in this case it is she who is forcibly removed. Yet, having introduced this motif, the narrator seems hardly to know what to do with it. We learn nothing of the fortunes of the two sons – whose upbringing Bevis, with careless alacrity, entrusts to the first passers-by (lines 4679–723) – until the various members of the family are reunited seven years later, their relations apparently completely unaffected by their prolonged separation. We never see Josian in a specifically maternal role.

In the episode of Josian's confinement, we encounter the notion, widespread in the Middle Ages (and since), that it is improper for a woman to allow a man to be present at her delivery (lines 4579–89).<sup>45</sup> That this has to do with female shame with regard to the process of parturition, rather than with a desire to preserve the mysteries of womanhood, is suggested by Boeve's assurance in the Anglo-Norman version of the romance that he will not think less of Josian if he is allowed to witness the birth of his children.<sup>46</sup>

So far, my discussion has been focused on mothers in relation to their sons; indeed, the romances have very little to say about mother–daughter relationships. Desonelle's mother features in *Torrent of Portyngale*, as has been seen – and the scenes of family reunion at the end of that romance include her reunion with her daughter – but in general the mothers of romance heroines are conspicuous by their absence.<sup>47</sup> Occasionally they appear in roles which suggest male fear and distrust of a sort of freemasonry of women, who pass down arcane knowledge from one generation to the next;<sup>48</sup> but usually they are dead before the story begins, sometimes with grave consequences for their daughters – as in the case of Emaré, who is forced to resist her father's incestuous advances (lines 262–4).<sup>49</sup> If, however, we see the wicked stepmothers and mothers-in-law of romance as representing 'displacement' of negative or ambivalent feelings towards the mother, we find that romance depictions of the maternal role are at their least positive where daughters are concerned, since it is almost invariably towards a younger woman that the malice of these mother-figures is directed.<sup>50</sup> It is refreshing, therefore, to find Floris's mother in *Floris and Blanchefleur* pleading with her husband for the life of Blanchefleur, towards whom she stands in the role of surrogate mother (lines 55ff.).<sup>51</sup>

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The most extended treatment of a mother–daughter relationship in Middle English romance is in *Lay le Freine*, the only Middle English romance apart from *Emaré* and its congener *Le Bone Florence of Rome* to have a female protagonist. When Freine's mother gives birth to twin daughters, she fears an accusation of adultery, since she has earlier made a slanderous accusation to this effect against her neighbour's wife when the latter was delivered of twin sons (lines 89–93).<sup>52</sup> Her motives for disposing of one of the infants compare unfavourably with those of Degaré's mother in a comparable situation,<sup>53</sup> and she actually intends initially to murder the baby outright. She is dissuaded from this extreme course by a young maiden who has been fostered in her household.<sup>54</sup> This surrogate daughter thus symbolises the redemptive power of the mother's better feelings, her capacity for maternal love. Later, this capacity is expressed in her instinctive recognition of her daughter,<sup>55</sup> and it enables her to acknowledge her fault and to seek and obtain her husband's forgiveness (lines 385–98).

In *Chevelere Assigne*, the motif of one woman accusing another of adultery because she has borne twins is combined with that of inordinate longing for children (lines 15–31).<sup>56</sup> This latter motif, which figures in a number of Middle English romances,<sup>57</sup> invariably presages disaster or anomaly of one sort or another, but it resists attempts at rationalisation. It occurs also in several traditional stories, including *Rapunzel*, *Thumbelina*<sup>58</sup> and *Little Prince Ivan*, *the Witch Baby* and *the Little Sister of the Sun*,<sup>59</sup> and seems to have remained unaffected in its essentials by its transference to a medieval context.

Attitudes towards mothers in the Middle English romances are on the whole not characterised by the extremes of idealisation or of censoriousness present in clerical writings; mothers are neither demeaned nor automatically dignified by their maternal role. The emotional potential of scenes between mother and child is not usually exploited to any marked degree, and it is the exception rather than the rule for much interest to be shown in young children.<sup>60</sup> Because romance so often concerns itself with a young man's growth to maturity, his rejection of his mother's love, usually as a prelude to redefinition of his relationship with her, is frequently represented: this may be done implicitly through the motif of separation in infancy or more explicitly, as in *Sir Perceval of Galles* and *Lybeaus Desconus*. Such traditional themes and motifs are made to serve the ends of a distinctly patriarchal ethos<sup>61</sup> and to reaffirm patrilineal values, but within the constraints that this imposes romance mothers often display a good deal of strength and dignity, exercising control over their own and their children's destinies in ways which would have found little if any counterpart in real

life. A rather surprising degree of sympathy is shown for unmarried mothers. Where darker, more ambivalent feelings about motherhood come nearer to the surface, it is usually in relation to female children; possibly this has to do with ambivalent attitudes of mothers themselves to their daughters in an age when sons were valued so much more highly,<sup>62</sup> and with male anxiety about a trans-generational conspiracy of women. In the romances in general, however, we find evidence that the medieval period was somewhat more sympathetic to female predicaments and less misogynistic than a study of its clerical writings alone might lead us to believe.<sup>63</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1976; repr. Harmondsworth: Peregrine Books, 1978), esp. pp. 66–73.
- 2 Edmund Colledge, OSA, and James Walsh, SJ (eds.), *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, Part 2, Studies and Texts 35 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), pp. 598–9.
- 3 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1982; repr. 1984), chapter iv.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 143–4.
- 5 See *ibid.*, pp. 136–7, and cf. Angela M. Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages: Religion, Marriage and Letters* (Brighton: Harvester, 1983; repr. 1988), p. 18; Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, trans. Chaya Galai (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 13.
- 6 See Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages*, pp. 7–8, and the Biblical and patristic authorities cited there.
- 7 See Vern L. Bullough, 'Medieval Medical and Scientific Views of Women', *Viator* 4 (1973), 487–93, pp. 490–1; Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 7–9, 31.
- 8 See Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages*, pp. 8–9; and, for the 'medical' corollary of this, Bullough, 'Medical and Scientific Views', pp. 496–7.
- 9 Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages*, pp. 4–5; Maclean, *Renaissance Notion of Woman*, pp. 10–11, 13–14, 15, 18–19.
- 10 Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages*, p. 19; Bullough, 'Medical and Scientific Views', pp. 489–90; Maclean, *Renaissance Notion of Woman*, pp. 17–18; Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, pp. 14–15.
- 11 Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages*, pp. 7–8.
- 12 Bella Millett (ed.), *Hali Meidbad*, EETS OS 284 (1982).
- 13 Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages*, pp. 26–7; Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, trans. Chaya Galai (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), pp. 65–9, and *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, p. 12.

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- 14 See the contribution by Judith Weiss, above pp. 7–8.
- 15 Nikki Stiller, *Eve's Orphans: Mothers and Daughters in Medieval English Literature* (Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 1980), pp. 5–6; Ann S. Haskell, 'The Paston Women on Marriage in Fifteenth-Century England', *Viator* 4 (1973), 469–70. On church disapproval of such practices, see Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, p. 216.
- 16 Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages*, pp. 83–5.
- 17 Bullough, 'Medical and Scientific Views', pp. 496–7; Haskell, 'The Paston Women on Marriage', pp. 469–70.
- 18 See Colin Richmond, 'The Pastons Revisited: Marriage and the Family in Fifteenth-Century England', *Bulletin of the Institute for Historical Research* 58 (1985), 25–36.
- 19 Haskell, 'The Paston Women on Marriage', p. 466; Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages*, pp. 89–90; Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, p. 24.
- 20 Haskell, 'The Paston Women on Marriage', p. 469. A somewhat different view, however, is taken by Shulamith Shahar, who reacts against the tendency, exemplified in particular by Ph. Ariès and his disciples, 'to ignore the immutable and universal elements' in their historical studies of early childhood: see Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, p. 1.
- 21 Emaré differs somewhat from the other examples cited in that she, not her son, is the protagonist of the story; in this case, therefore, her calumny is not an initiating action.
- 22 The term is used in Stephen Knight, 'The Social Function of the Middle English Romances', in David Aers (ed.), *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology & History* (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), 99–122, pp. 110–14.
- 23 References are to Frances McSparran (ed.), *Octavian*, EETS OS 289 (1986).
- 24 The development of the positive aspects of Florence's maternity seem to be largely the invention of the redactor of the Northern *Octavian*. In the Southern version, which in this respect stands closer to the romance's French source, it is the onlookers' pity, rather than any prayer by Florence herself, that moves her husband to transmute her sentence; the key references to Mary are absent; the contrast between Florence's courage and the shipmen's fear is less pronounced; and in the reconciliation scene, Florence's account of her doings is much longer and more self-orientated.
- 25 The romance is edited in Maldwyn Mills (ed.), *Six Middle English Romances* (London: Dent; Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), pp. 46–74. All subsequent references are to this edition.
- 26 References are to James Orchard Halliwell (ed.), *The Romance of Syr Tryamour* (London: The Percy Society, 1846). According to certain didactic writers, a primary function of mothers was to rear their sons until the age of seven: see Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, p. 209.
- 27 This is also true of *Isumbras*, where the father is the protagonist and his wife's feelings are of secondary importance. We hear nothing of her emotions when the family is reunited at the end of the romance (lines 751–74). I cite the text in Mills (ed.), *Six Middle English Romances*, pp. 125–47.
- 28 References are to Arthur Dickson (ed.), *Valentine and Orson*, EETS OS 204 (1937; repr. 1971).

- 29 The term is borrowed from Susan Wittig, *Stylistic and Narrative Structures in the Middle English Romances* (Austin, Texas and London, 1978), p. 121.
- 30 Frances E. Richardson (ed.), *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, EETS OS 256 (1965), p. xxxvii. All subsequent references to *Eglamour* are to this edition. It is somewhat puzzling that Cristabelle later conceals what has happened from her uncle (lines 938–40).
- 31 References are to E. Adam (ed.), *Torrent of Portyngale*, EETS ES 51 (1887).
- 32 References are to the edition in A. V. C. Schmidt and Nicolas Jacobs (eds.), *Medieval English Romances*, 2 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), II, pp. 57–88.
- 33 References are to W. Aldis Wright (ed.), *Generydes*, EETS OS 55, 70 (1878; repr. 1975). See the discussion of the episode of Generydes' conception in Elizabeth Williams, 'Hunting the Deer: Some Uses of a Motif-Complex in Middle English Romance and Saint's Life', in Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows and Carol M. Meale (eds.), *Romance in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), 187–206, pp. 205–6.
- 34 An interesting reversal of this pattern occurs in *Sir Gowther*, where the hero is begotten by the devil (lines 70–5) and must disavow his father through penance. References are to the edition in Mills (ed.), *Six Middle English Romances*, pp. 148–68.
- 35 E.g. *Sir Degarré*, lines 1037ff.; *Torrent of Portyngale*, lines 2263–8; *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, lines 1237ff. (Lincoln text).
- 36 Knight, 'Social Function', p. 112. The motif of battle between father and son is not, of course, peculiar to medieval literature: see A. Ewert (ed.), *Marie de France: Lais* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), p. 181.
- 37 Julie Burton, 'Folktale, Romance and Shakespeare', in Derek Brewer (ed.), *Studies in Medieval English Romances: Some New Approaches* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1988), 176–9, p. 187.
- 38 References are to the edition in Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale (eds.), *Middle English Metrical Romances* (1930; repr. New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), pp. 531–603.
- 39 Note Perceval's acknowledgement of his mother's natural claim on him: 'Me aughte to bryng hir of wa: / I laye in hir syde' (lines 2175–6); it is, as far as I know, unique in Middle English romance.
- 40 References are to M. Mills (ed.), *Lybeaus Desconus*, EETS OS 261 (1969). The omission from MS Cotton Caligula A.ii of the lines cited is probably due to homoeoarchy.
- 41 A son would, of course, assume his father's rights and responsibilities upon the latter's death.
- 42 I cite the edition in French and Hale (eds.), *Middle English Metrical Romances*, pp. 25–70.
- 43 References are to Jennifer Fellows (ed.), 'Sir Beves of Hampton: Study and Edition', 5 vols. (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1980), II.
- 44 It is interesting that, while the account of Guy's prowess at the beginning of *Bevis* is clearly intended as a kind of vicarious enhancement of the hero's own



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- glory, the fact that Bevis's mother is a thoroughly bad lot is equally clearly *not* meant to reflect upon him in any way.
- 45 See the commentary on these lines in Eugen Kölbing (ed.), *The Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun*, 3 vols., EETS ES 46, 48, 65 (1885-94), p. 335.
  - 46 Albert Stimming (ed.), *Der anglonormannische Boeve de Haumtone*, Bibliotheca Normannica 7 (Halle, 1899), line 2701.
  - 47 Cf. Judith Weiss, 'The Wooing Woman in Anglo-Norman Romance', in Mills, Fellows and Meale (eds.), *Romance in Medieval England*, 149-61, p. 155. A notable exception is MacEdward Leach (ed.), *Amis and Amiloun*, EETS OS 203 (1937; repr. 1960), lines 889ff., where Belisaunt's mother joins her daughter in standing surety for Amis, and risks burning at the stake as a result.
  - 48 See the discussion of Guenevere's mother's role in *The Awntyrs off Arthure* in Stiller, *Eve's Orphans*, pp. 74-5. In the Tristan story, of course, it is Iseult's mother who mixes the potion that brings the lovers together (ibid., pp. 95-6).
  - 49 The father-daughter incest motif is also vestigially present in *Degaré* (lines 167-9).
  - 50 An exception here is the werewolf in *William of Palerne*, who has been transformed by his wicked stepmother. Cf. also Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, p. 160 and n. 108 (pp. 308-9), who claims that in folk-tale stepsons are more often objects of hostility than are stepdaughters.
  - 51 I cite the edition in French and Hale (eds.), *Middle English Metrical Romances*, pp. 823-55.
  - 52 References are to the edition in Thomas C. Rumble (ed.), *The Breton Lays in Middle English* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1965), pp. 81-94.
  - 53 See pp. 49-50 above. The mother in *Freine* is motivated entirely by the desire to save her own face, even at the expense of her child's life.
  - 54 The lines are in fact Weber's reconstruction of the text on the basis of Marie de France's version of the lay, for the unique manuscript of the Middle English *Freine* is physically defective at this point.
  - 55 I say 'instinctive' because, even before the relationship is discovered by means of the mantle in which the infant Freine was wrapped, we are told that her mother feels affectionately drawn towards her (lines 355-8); cf. Ewert (ed.), *Marie de France: Lais*, p. 44 (lines 383-8).
  - 56 I cite the edition in Diane Speed (ed.), *Medieval English Romances*, 2nd edn., 2 vols. (Sydney: Department of English, University of Sydney, 1989), pp. 150-70. I am grateful to Miss Elizabeth Williams for drawing my attention to the occurrence of the slander motif in this text.
  - 57 E.g. in *Octavian*, lines 31-48 (Cambridge text); *Sir Gowther*, lines 58-63.
  - 58 I am grateful to my daughter, Eleanor Fellows, for bringing this to my attention.
  - 59 This traditional story is retold in Arthur Ransome, *Old Peter's Russian Tales* (London: Nelson, 1916).
  - 60 Such an exception is provided by *Emaré*: see above n. 27.
  - 61 In *Amis and Amiloun*, Amis's children are sacrificed to the demands of male friendship. There is no criticism of their mother, who utters the egregiously

unmaternal sentiment: 'God may sende ous childer mo, / Of hem haue þou no care' (lines 393-4).

- 62 If we assume that most, if not all, of the Middle English romances were written by men, any ambivalence of mothers towards daughters that we find expressed there may well owe more to the eye of the male beholder than to medieval actuality. Cf. Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*, pp. 43-5.
- 63 See further, for the resonances in Chaucer's handling of parental roles, Jill Mann, 'Parents and Children in the *Canterbury Tales*', in Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (eds.), *Literature in Fourteenth-Century England: The J. A. W. Bennett Memorial Lectures Perugia 1981-1982*, Tübinger Beiträge zur Anglistik 5 (Tübingen and Cambridge, 1983), pp. 165-83.

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‘Clerc u lai, muïne u dame’: women and  
Anglo-Norman hagiography in the twelfth and  
thirteenth centuries

JOCELYN WOGAN-BROWNE

‘Tut cil . . . romanz qui unt fait del martyr  
Clerc u lai, muïne u dame’

[All the . . . vernacular Lives which have been composed about the martyr by clerics or laypeople, monks or a woman]<sup>1</sup>

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In the context of women and literature in medieval Britain, an important fact about the Anglo-Norman hagiographic corpus is that it includes three texts by women, two of whom were certainly, and the third perhaps, nuns.<sup>2</sup> This is not a great deal in comparison with the literary production of continental religious women, but is significant in the insular context where (as far as is currently known) there is little vernacular writing by women until the later Middle Ages. To contextualise these three works, it is necessary to consider Anglo-Norman verse hagiography in general and nunneries and their cultural traditions in particular. Since Anglo-Norman religious and lay noblewomen are in many ways closely linked with each other, saints’ lives can have implications for a wider range of women than at first appears. Even this wider group is a select and privileged one, but its social position and relative absence of economic constraint, combined with the gender-based restrictions and occlusion suffered by it, make it an eloquent example of the problematic relations between women and cultural representation. I shall briefly consider these issues before moving to the three texts by women.

The importance of patronage – royal, ecclesiastical, noble and gentry – in insular literary production has long been recognised, as has the relative prominence of noblewomen as patrons and audiences in many genres of Anglo-Norman literature,<sup>3</sup> and women are among the patrons and dedicatees, as well as the writers, of hagiography. From the late twelfth

century to the early fourteenth century, there survive approximately sixty Anglo-Norman verse *Lives* of some thirty-six saints.<sup>4</sup> Among the dozen or so *Lives* which identify patrons and/or dedicatees, there are three dedicated to royal or noblewomen,<sup>5</sup> one written for a nun in a house of St Lawrence,<sup>6</sup> and one where the author thanks 'the abbess, sister of St Thomas [Becket]' for material support during his work in England on the revised version of his *Life of the saint*.<sup>7</sup> Where there is direct evidence for women's association with hagiography's initial production contexts and audiences it tends to be in noble or gentry circles (whether lay or in the largely aristocratic and gentry religious houses characteristic of the period). Distinctions between these secular and religious patrons and audiences are not as sharp as may initially appear.

Like two, and probably all three, of those certainly written by women, most saints' lives were initially produced in religious houses and are often preserved in manuscripts from such houses. However, contemporary indications of their uses and audiences suggest an interest in them which extended beyond these initial contexts.<sup>8</sup> Some saints' lives occur in clerically produced compilations for lay patrons;<sup>9</sup> others, while in the company of clerical texts, must have been designed for use with lay audiences. (It is hard to explain the presence of an Anglo-Norman *Life of St Margaret* in a manuscript collection of medical treatises, for instance, unless it was read to women in labour.)<sup>10</sup> The *Life of Edward the Confessor* by the nun of Barking was read in male as well as female houses, transposed into different generic contexts and re-worked on the Continent for at least one noble family.<sup>11</sup> Women would have heard and sometimes read saints' lives in religious communities, but would also have heard them as part of the mixed audiences of secular households.<sup>12</sup> The differences between lay and secular culture are for many purposes less important than the mutually intelligible interests of church and lay upper-class landholders. The medieval noble household was itself a kind of religious community, maintaining its own chapels and chaplains, festivals and commemorations, while religious houses on the other hand required highly codified etiquette and regulation of their internal and external social relations as much as any courtly household.<sup>13</sup> For women, the absence of full institutional ecclesiastical and monastic life made for a further reduction in distinctions between lay and religious lives. Only the most wealthy and prestigious nunneries resembled institutional male monasticism in the nature of the experiences and resources available, such as access to large libraries, traditions of institutional continuity and internal culture and a continuous history of collective experience in legal and social dealings outside the religious community.<sup>14</sup> Even the greatest nunneries fulfilled the function of

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upper-class *gynacea*, providing places for widows and other women unaccommodated within their paternal or marital households' dynastic arrangements. This, together with the fact that widowed royal, noble and gentrywomen were often appointed as abbesses in, or gave endowments to, female religious houses, meant that the social circles of nunneries included links with noble or gentry houses and in some cases the royal court as well as with the episcopacy.<sup>15</sup>

Unequal as the resources and opportunities of male and female monasticism were, nuns in a royal house might be better off and in touch with a wider and more cosmopolitan circle than monks in a small poor house. Though the active participation of even the most privileged women in literary production seems heuristic – an incidental exercise of tastes, interests and abilities by women who had the means to pursue their chosen activities – and though this participation is accompanied by a lack of formal institutional access to Latin learning and to Latin literary production, it is not incompatible with a high level of learning on the part of particular women. There are several indications that within the culture of specific communities and social groups, female learning, patronage and even Latin composition had the status of at least a convention or a custom, if not that of an institution.<sup>16</sup> There are cases of Latin as well as vernacular Lives being commissioned by lay and religious women,<sup>17</sup> and the claim of female hagiographers to be writing inadequate French, along with other humility *topoi*, should not be taken as a literal claim to incapacity.<sup>18</sup> The French of the nunneries was in any case not a gender-based ghetto language: a great deal of French was used in monasteries in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,<sup>19</sup> and monastic hagiographers apologize for insular French in the same humility *topoi* as are used by the nuns.<sup>20</sup>

Even though sixteen of these Anglo-Norman verse Lives are of female saints (some, such as Catherine and Margaret, the subject of many different versions), this does not reflect a contemporary ecclesiastical prestige in sanctity for women, very few of whom were canonized in the high Middle Ages.<sup>21</sup> The female saints of the corpus principally comprise semi-legendary virgin martyrs, penitent harlots and a small group of native British abbesses. There are eight traditional virgin martyrs (Agatha, Agnes, Catherine, Christine, Faith, Juliana, Lucy, Margaret) and one pre-Conquest British virgin abbess and martyr (Osith); three penitent harlots (Mary of Egypt, Mary Magdalen, Thaïs) and two pre-Conquest British virgin abbesses (Audrée [Etheldreda] and Modwenna). Married women with children do not generally appear as saints until the later thirteenth century.<sup>22</sup> In the Anglo-Norman corpus they are represented only by Nicole Bozon's short Life of Elizabeth of Hungary (late thirteenth

– early fourteenth century) which marks the entry into insular female sanctity of new trends better established on the continent.<sup>23</sup> Married women in the earlier corpus are the (sometimes un-named) mothers or spouses of saints. A few women make appearances in minor roles, such as tending holy corpses and shrines, and some are the object of miracles.<sup>24</sup> Here the class-range envisaged is rather wider, but most women in the corpus, in line with the status of the males to whom they are appended, are gentry or above, and all the female saints are high-born.<sup>25</sup> Among the native saints, the three women (Etheldreda, Modwenna, Osith) are all virgin princesses and subsequently royal abbesses, whereas the native male ecclesiastical saints (Edmund of Abingdon, Becket, Richard of Chichester) have meritocratic clerical careers and are not royal or even, necessarily, noble by birth.<sup>26</sup>

The major category of female saint, the virgin martyr, offers exemplary narratives in which the saint's best demonstration of sanctity is her preference for death over dishonour, and where her ability to pursue and defend her faith is met with savage and spectacular torture by a patriarchy presented as pagan but sharing some behaviour (such as a readiness to constrain daughters and to refuse to hear their refusals) with Christian fathers and suitors. The second major category of female saint, the repentant harlot, is usually put on a regime of penance and austerity harsh enough to suggest an affinity with the dismembering of virgin martyrs and, like those spectacles of torture themselves, to make hagiography a problematic genre if it is to be considered as a provider of exemplary biographies and behavioural models for women.<sup>27</sup> As with many other bodies of evidence, Anglo-Norman hagiography would seem more liable to yield information about clerical and seignorial mentalities than to represent or address the experience of Anglo-Norman noble and gentry women (let alone women of lower class). Nevertheless, just as literary representation has implications for, but is not precisely commensurate with, socio-economic standing, so there is often, even in stereotypical representation of women, the potential of slippage between particular hagiographic texts and their readers' responses to them. Identification between martyrdom and female asceticism can be used in different ways. Some women, most famously Christina of Markyate,<sup>28</sup> seem to have used hagiography for their own purposes, and in (especially) the genre's sophisticated examples, meaning is in any case complex and to a significant extent negotiable between reader and text, rather than automatically fixed by the text.<sup>29</sup> Though a clerical and aristocratic culture allowing access to privileged women may remain 'overwhelmingly male', this does not mean

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that the saints' lives have nothing to say to women or that women can say nothing in, through, or in response to them.<sup>30</sup>

Two important, if obvious, areas where hagiography has much to say to women are those of career virginity or chastity (in so far as hagiography provides exemplary biographies of female religious careers) and career marriage – though for the latter, at this period, hagiography is less important in providing models of domestic comportment for women, than in its contribution to the politics of genealogical and property transmission.<sup>31</sup> Though practising a wide range of actual occupations and skills, twelfth- and thirteenth-century women are often conceptualised and addressed by their marital status (*either* wives and mothers *or* brides of Christ), so that much of what is addressed to women, perceived in terms of either kind of marriage, is of relevance to its obverse.<sup>32</sup> Moreover many Anglo-Norman women experienced or chose possibilities from both categories in a single lifetime, many spending periods in religious houses before or after marriage and often in widowhood preferring professed chastity rather than re-marriage. The three Lives by women, even though concerned with three different styles of virginity – a virgin martyr, a virgin abbess and a virgin spouse – are not necessarily confined in their implications to audiences of nuns. There is a large proportion of the Anglo-Norman corpus which can be viewed in terms of these concerns, as well as historical cases which offer parallels. Christina of Markyate (d. c. 1161) had to fight against forced betrothal, marital rape and parental violence, and even ecclesiastical as well as other forms of social pressure, to win her religious career.<sup>33</sup> Agnes de Vere (d. early thirteenth century) had on the other hand to fight dishonour as an abandoned bride, being betrothed first to the count of Oxford, then to his father, and then imprisoned by the de Veres in an attempt to force her to give up the match after her own father, Henry II's Royal Constable, Henry of Essex, was disgraced. After papal intervention, the twenty-year-old bride married the sixty-year-old earl of Oxford, produced four or five children, and paid a large sum not to re-marry after his death in 1194.<sup>34</sup>

Marie (of Chatteris's?) *Vie sainte Audrée*, a reworking of the post-Conquest Latin life of Etheldreda (Anglo-Saxon virgin saint and foundress of the powerful house of Ely) suggests that, even after appropriation by male clerisy, female saints remained of interest and supplied potential models for post-Conquest women.<sup>35</sup> Like the houses of other native British abbesses such as Osith and Modwenna, Etheldreda's foundation for women had become a male house by the time of her post-Conquest Latin *vita*. The saint thus to some extent is a figurehead for the monastery

propagating her cult, and there is a sense in which Etheldreda represents Ely, Modwenna Burton and Osith Chich (and possibly Aylesbury) rather than, or as well as, a successful female career.<sup>36</sup> In each case, too, the post-Conquest Life leans towards the virgin-martyr narrative model as a principal measure of achievement: Audrée and Osith are princesses who must resist and flee their reprehensibly insistent or pagan husbands in order to demonstrate their preference for the Christ bridegroom; Osith is finally martyred by invading Danes; and Modwenna and Audrée both practise the martyrdom of ascetic regimes of fasting and other penitential disciplines. Nevertheless, the virgin foundress's fiscal and territorial authority and the abbess's administrative powers and moral and social authority within and outside her community are represented in these Lives. They are encoded in the miracles of provision, problem-solving, vengeance and protection by which their protagonists found and sustain their houses and promote their own posthumous cults.<sup>37</sup> The vernacular Lives, less immediately tied to the originating male house's interests, provide a generalisable pattern of female achievement of some traditional authority. It was a pattern still recognisable in the lives of post-Conquest religious women, where some abbesses held their abbeys as baronial fiefs from the crown and where Anglo-Norman noble and gentry widows could still command significant powers of foundation and patronage. *Audrée* has been little commented on until recently, being seen as too close a translation of its Latin source to convey much new information. Such a view neglects the argument that extensive rearrangements of the source's subject matter are not the only, or necessarily the most important, form of textual difference, and the fact that there *are* small but significant changes (whereby, for instance, volition rather than passivity is ascribed to the saint). In any case, a French life by (probably) a nun in a female community about the hard-fought virgin career of St Audrée is in a different koiné and has different relations with its textual community from the Latin *vita* of the saint incorporated into the *Liber Eliensis* and used in defence of monastic property rights. When Audrée, following her escape from her second husband, re-routes the dower from her first virginal marriage into the founding of a religious house, her avoidance of consummation and use of her legal right to dower makes her virginity the foundation of a female religious career rather than a symbol of intact monastic property claims. The difference between virginity as a symbolic land-charter, and a title to dower land as a charter for career virginity, is a difference of some relevance to the concerns of historical Anglo-Norman women patronesses and foundresses.<sup>38</sup> Though less often retold than virgin martyr or harlot Lives, the Lives of abbess saints provide representations of non-marital destinies for Anglo-Norman



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women exemplifying a wider range of female achievement than that of dying in defence of one's chastity.

Both the remaining *Lives* certainly written by women were produced in the late twelfth century<sup>39</sup> in one of the longest-established and relatively undisrupted institutional contexts for female learning in Britain, Barking Abbey. Guernes de Pont-Ste-Maxence very possibly has Barking hagiography in mind when, in the lines quoted above from his *Life of Becket* (p. 61), he envisages *Lives* of the martyr as written by 'clerics or laypeople, monks or a woman'.<sup>40</sup> Barking had a tradition of Latinity which survived the Conquest, and it shared in the cultivated Anglo-Latin and Anglo-French letters practised at the Anglo-Norman royal court from which several of its literate and Latinate twelfth-century abbesses were drawn.<sup>41</sup> Clemence of Barking's *Life of St Catherine*, with its internal audience of 'gentils pulceles . . . e nobles barnesses beles' (lines 2537–8), is appropriately the life of a learned and aristocratic female saint who defeats fifty pagan professional clerics in argument. An elegant and accomplished re-working of its source, this *Life of St Catherine* differs from many other vernacular *Lives* in giving an account of its heroine's state of mind rather than her looks (lines 143–58), and in its presentation of a pagan viewpoint as capable of rational questioning of Christianity. The emperor Maxence and his fifty philosophers are initially presented not as 'heathen dogs' or 'mad wolves' (as in for instance the Early Middle English *Seinte Katerine*), but as holding beliefs culturally normative for them, so that the subsequent exposure of pagan culture and the psychopathology of secular power is unusually convincing and intellectually nuanced. A distinctive emotional context and motivation for torture is also here created. The emperor, having failed to torture or even frighten Catherine with his specially designed wheel, is further discomfited to find that his wife is Catherine's convert. In a sophisticated adaptation of courtly-love material, Clemence of Barking adds a lament in which, echoing the soliloquies of the *Tristan* poems and Chrétien de Troyes, the emperor first mourns his own loss and the queen herself:

Reine, u averai ge confort  
Aprés ta doleruse mort . . .  
Comment viveras tu sanz mei,  
Et ge coment viverai sanz tei?

(lines 2171–2, 2175–6);<sup>42</sup>

then applies the usual *topoi* of the lover's controverted will to his own position as tyrant ruler and husband ('What joy can I have in power opposed to desire?' lines 2207–8). He then, in the same speech, moves

seamlessly into deciding that his wife has dishonoured him and threatened the security of his reign (lines 2218–28). Out of this divided condition ('I am a slave [serf] and no emperor', line 2390), he snarls at the queen that he will take away any comfort in death for her by the new torture ('peines noveles', line 2253) of first tearing off her breasts. However pathological, the emperor's condition constitutes a motivating emotional context for the queen's torture. This is not developed in other vernacular Lives, whereas the Barking Life explores and exposes not only the pagan emperor's condition, but the perverse status of (unspiritual) *fin'amors* and its inverted power relations. The Life's comprehensive attention to emotional and social realities is further apparent when the emperor (in a point of legal and social significance for Anglo-Norman women)<sup>43</sup> is made to exempt his queen's dower from what he is prepared to offer Catherine as his second wife: 'you can have everything except her dower [sun duaire], with regard to which I do not want to wrong her' (1271–2). In *La vie de sainte Catherine*, a virgin instructs, comforts and provides a model for a married woman: a queen of heaven gives leadership to a queen of earth. Here too a professionally virgin author chooses to re-work a virgin *passio* (very few of which are known to have been written by women) and adapts it by minimising the salaciousness of torture of women and emphasising the intellectual and emotional realities of choosing career virginity. Clemence of Barking's Life of St Catherine has recently begun to receive recognition for its poised rehandling of the Latin source and its courtly and doctrinal sophistication:<sup>44</sup> it is a text which deserves to be better known and which should be seen alongside such contemporary and comparable works as the *Lais* of Marie de France.

The Barking *Vie d'Edouard le confesseur* has been rather overshadowed by the question of its links to the Life of Catherine,<sup>45</sup> as also by Matthew Paris's thirteenth-century Life of the Confessor.<sup>46</sup> As an Anglo-Norman nun's account of a virgin Anglo-Saxon king, however, *Edouard* is important as a woman writer's account of hagiographic virginity, can be compared with a slightly later Life in Anglo-Norman by a monk using the same source, throws light on themes important in the hagiographic corpus as a whole, and, like the Barking *Catherine*, is among the earliest texts in Britain to use the term 'fin'amur'.

Both the nun of Barking in the late twelfth century and the monk of St Alban's in the mid thirteenth century write with an Anglo-Norman court in mind (respectively those of Henry II and III) and in the light of royal propagation of the Confessor's cult.<sup>47</sup> An important concern in their Lives is Edward's marriage and the English succession. As a way of asserting continuity while admitting rupture, the cult of the childless Edward offers

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promising material for presenting the history of the English throne as a succession both legitimate and legitimately disrupted. In the delicate matter of Edward's lack of progeny and his marriage to the daughter of an English baron rebellious to the point of treachery and exile but too powerful to be ignored, the two vernacular Lives follow their common source, Aelred of Rievaulx's *vita*, and present Edward's alliance as a hagiographic chaste marriage. There are significant differences in their approach which can be here pursued via their treatment of Edward's bride Edith. Aelred's portrait of Earl Godwin's daughter and Edward's queen-to-be is of a virgin produced by the treacherous Godwin 'sicut spina rosam' [as a thorn a rose],<sup>48</sup> and destined by God as a fitting partner for his beloved Edward. Serious and modest, Edith by preference keeps to her chamber where, never idle, she reads or embroiders marvellously. She is pre-eminent in the beauty of her appearance, but much more beautiful in the uprightness of her ways: Edith's life in her 'thalamus' [chamber] already has spiritual nuptial overtones of the bride of Christ in her bower. Matthew Paris's account makes Edith a romance heroine: her beauty, good manners, and accomplishments are noted, her pre-eminence is given a romance formulation (she is admired from 'England to Alexandria', line 1158, and her skill in embroidery is unequalled 'as far as Constantinople', line 1166). The beautifully wrought and coloured 'people, birds, beasts and flowers' (line 1163) represented in her embroidery serve as the rhetorical environment of a courtly heroine, fashioned and presented by 'clerks' (line 1174) who can 'translate' the 'thorn producing a rose' formula.<sup>49</sup>

The Barking portrait includes Edith's volition as well as her embroidery. When she is tired of embroidery, she switches to books.<sup>50</sup> The lexical order of the 'thorn and rose' formula is inverted so that 'la rose ist de l'espine' [the rose comes from the thorn] (line 1257), – rather than being produced by it – and the portrait adds a riddling meditation on Edith's spiritualising of her genealogy. She ought to be the more praised for having changed the nature of ('desnaturee', line 1292) her origins. The cultural self-production of the modest and self-contained virgin is a familiar theme in virginity literature, perhaps best known from Chaucer's classicising rendition of it in *The Physician's Tale*. But here, the virgin produces not only herself (and her embroidery), but change in the quality of her lineage. The flower on the stem of Godwin's family tree grows through Edith's active submission of her will to God (lines 1257–60). This is a very different location of value from Matthew Paris's perfectly socialised courtly heroine, suitable for exchange in marriage because she is equipped with piety and etiquette, but not with a will of her own.

The Barking Life is the only version to give Edith a point of view and to

add a speech for her (lines 1371–86) on the wedding night, both well prepared for by its portrait of her. Edith's agreement to mutual perpetual virginity is not an issue for Matthew Paris (or Aelred): her assent is noted (canon law required married people to obtain their spouse's consent to a life of chastity), but not explained or dramatised, simply secured by Edward. What is reported from the outside in Aelred and Matthew Paris becomes a scene of much greater intimacy and emotional conviction in the Barking Life as the king retires into a 'private place' ('un secré liu', line 1345) and sends for his bride to join him. In a spatial and emotional locale continuous with the chamber inhabited by Edith as Christ's self-dedicating bride, Edward asks her for mutual commitment to the 'fin amur' (line 1360) exemplified by God's own espousal of chastity:

Tant est chastée gloriuse  
 Ke ele est a Deu faite espuse  
 . . . lui rent tute la duçur  
 Del delit de sa fin amur  
 U que il seit, ou lui serra,  
 U qu'il voist, ele le sivra.' (lines 1355–62)

Chastity is so glorious that she has been made God's spouse . . . he returns to her all the sweetness of the pleasure of her refined love. Wherever he is, she will be with him, wherever he goes, she will follow him.

Edith delightedly assents, adding a prayer that, since God has given Edward the desire to preserve chastity, he may give him the power to do so (lines 1385–6).

The hagiographic model of the chaste spouse can be seen as part of the complex debate within and between competing lay and ecclesiastical models of marriage as these evolved in theory and practice in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>51</sup> The contestation of resources and powers in lineage and property is embodied in the model of virginal marriage and its challenge to the 'vision of social order as a genealogico-historical continuity'.<sup>52</sup> In the case of the Alexis legend, for instance, the saint's renunciation of his bride and family in a dramatic wedding-night confrontation of the claims of chastity against those of lineage makes this a continually provocative Life for over a century. Many different kinds of saints made their appearance in the vernaculars as virginal and chaste spouses at this time and there are parallels in continental hagiography for the Barking *Edouard's* treatment of historical childless royal couples.<sup>53</sup>

As has often been noted, one associated (but not necessarily intended) consequence of the sacramental development of marriage at this period was that canon law's insistence on the free and mutual consent of spouses

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theorised, even though it did not always secure in practice, the importance of female consent, both to marriage and to chastity.<sup>54</sup> In the hagiography of virgin saints and spouses, an inadvertent authorisation of female volition and a framework for contesting seigneurial traffic in women is available for use by professionally chaste women, or women who desire to be so, and can also provide models for women who, willingly or otherwise, are exchanged in marriage. Contemporary evidence of perceived links here include the fact that the earliest extant text of the Alexis legend was copied into the psalter produced by the monks of St Albans for Christina of Markyate, and that concern with the responses of the chaste bridegroom's spouse is an important feature of the medieval development of this legend.<sup>55</sup> A sense of the objections and questions which might quite properly be put by Alexis's bride are strongly enough registered by medieval audiences for the vernacular Alexis legend to be modified in its later twelfth- and thirteenth-century versions. Though she is an anonymous and silent object of Alexis's perception in the nuptial scene of the oldest surviving version,<sup>56</sup> the bride is given a name in some later versions (even if only the appropriate one of 'Lesigne'); she acquires speeches and questions; her grief and her plight (potential dishonour as an abandoned bride) are voiced in varying ways; and her consent to Alexis's chastity is actively sought and negotiated.<sup>57</sup> Matthew Paris's and the Latin Lives of the Confessor fail to exploit the dimension of female consent (even for its usefulness in explaining the hero's behaviour): by assuming Edith's complete socialisation and absence of autonomous volition apart from Edward's, they avoid having to confront the implications of virginity through its impact on another person. In this way their texts offer normative accounts of the exchange of women, but are less effective in elucidating the powerful (and contested) contemporary ideal of chaste marriage than the Barking Life.

Women and royalty experience particular constraints in lineage arrangements, and the Barking *Edouard* is specially interesting for its crossing of types and genders. Edith is in the position both of the would-be professed virgin and of the bride whose will is potentially to be violated or ignored, while Edward, as king, is constrained by lineage demands in a way that moves him into the position of the female virgin saint. He has outwardly to accept the course of events while inwardly and vividly desiring a different outcome, and he has to respond passively or evasively, in the hope, if not of delaying enforced marriage, at least of not speeding it up. Like Audrée, Osith, and other virgin saints, when he prays passionately for his chastity while accepting his court's demand that he should be married, he can only leave the outcome of events to God.<sup>58</sup> The choice of virginity as a basis for opposing the commodification of female bodies in marriage and for

recovering a (limited and contained) autonomy is thus in the Barking *Edouard* made a possibility for both genders. Edith's and Edward's desires for virginity are answered by the joyful discovery that marriage will involve no violation of Edith's will or refusal of Edward's desire, and they are able to live with a quiet and private satisfaction between themselves and God, while preserving the social forms demanded of them. The crossover is not quite symmetrical here, in that Edith's gender leaves her potentially open to the problems of both a Lesigne and an Audrée, an Agnes de Vere or a Christina of Markyate.<sup>59</sup> Edward experiences constraint of his will only with respect to his social role as king: as Aelred's and Matthew Paris's treatments show, physical constraint of his person is not anticipated in his marriage, and the gender-based physical compulsion represented in female virgin martyr Lives is lacking to complete the parallel.

The Barking Life creates a greater interiority and affective content both in Edward's dilemma and in its presentation of virginity.<sup>60</sup> Where, for Matthew Paris, Edward's choices in the matter of trying to please both his barons and his Lord ('mun barunage . . . päer, e a Deu pleisir', lines 1123-4) are political, the Barking Life develops Aelred's account of Edward's praise of the Virgin's chaste marriage into an extended, thematically interwoven meditation on creation, chastity and the ownership of the person. Christ is enfleshed human as well as political-spiritual overlord:

Ses *fiz* fus fait a ki ies *pere*.  
 Ceste fu et *mere* et *mescine*,  
 Ancele en terre, en ciel *reïne*.  
*Chaste* fu, *chaste* la trovas  
 Et *chastement* son cors amas.  
 A tei plut tant sa *chastée*  
 Ke de sun cors fu le tuen né . . .

Sire, entendez a ma querele.  
 Tis *serf* sui et fiz de t'*ancele*.  
 Tu me *feïs* quant rien ne *fui*.  
 Quels que *seie*, certes tuen *sui*.  
 Pur *amur* a ta chaste *amie*,  
 Maintenez mei en chaste vie.

(lines 1186-92, 1201-06, my emphasis)

You were made the son of her of whom you were the father.  
 She was both mother and maiden,  
 Handmaid in earth, queen in heaven  
 Chaste she was and chaste you found her  
 And chastely loved her [body].  
 Her chastity pleased you so  
 That from her body yours was born . . .

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Lord, hear my suit.  
I am your servant, and son of your handmaid.  
You made me when I was nothing.  
Whatever I may be, certainly I am yours.  
For love of your chaste [female] lover  
Keep me in chastity.

These elegant and ardent paradoxes do not seem apprentice or derivative work, but an expression of stylistic poise and freedom of treatment.<sup>61</sup> What is also striking here, as it is in the wedding-night scene, is (to use Susan Mosher Stuard's term)<sup>62</sup> the gender-permeability of the symbolism as a professionally virgin woman writes speeches for a virgin king proposing to his wife a virginity where both he and she aspire to the female *persona* of chastity. Edouard can be the spouse to God's bridegroom, while Edith can be chaste spouse to both her earthly and spiritual lord, in an early example of the richness and flexibility of medieval symbolism in its deployments of gender and spirituality.

This contained interior sanctity, not manifested in outward crises but in inward moments of perception, response and volition, can exist partly *because* it is contained within, rather than actively challenging to, the politics of rule. The Barking Life spiritualises and recontains the politics of succession and affiliation. Disruption in the royal lineage, as in the transmission of power, is given reputable ancestry in Edward's prophetic deathbed report of a visionary tree of succession which mysteriously moves away from its roots only to be rejoined and to flower once more.<sup>63</sup> This dislocation is ascribed not to Edward but to the sins of the English. Referring rupture to the people's sins rationalises church control of behaviour (by its ultimate grounding in the initial rupture of the Fall and humanity's consequent need for correction) and also leaves unchallenged royal and noble strategies for obtaining and legitimating power. It successfully occludes the problem faced several times by the Norman and Angevin kings, including Henry II (Henry *FitzEmpress*), of having to legitimate their succession through the female line. The tactic of moralising and spiritualising rupture has special appropriateness in insular culture as an ecclesiastical version of the contemporary interest in legitimating origins: it has secular parallels in the Anglo-Norman dynastic romance and also in the problematics of continuity and legitimation from Troy to Arthur in the matter of Britain.<sup>64</sup>

The fact of a woman's writing does not entail her writing, with anachronistic radicalism, entirely outside the political assumptions of her class. Within its general acceptance of a moralising and ecclesiastical

framing of historical processes, the Barking *Edouard* does however contribute to the politics of sanctity and genealogical transmission, not only supplying an explicit viewpoint for the female subject (absent from the early Alexis text in Christina of Markyate's psalter), but extending its revision of the politics of marital exchange and the body to the king himself.

The presence of three women writers among the producers of Anglo-Norman saints' lives shows that women could and did write hagiography in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Britain. Why are there not more Lives from, say, the great nunneries of Amesbury, Shaftesbury or Wilton as well as Barking, or Lives from women in secular court circles? Perhaps there are – or were – but it is in my view more probable that the small number of texts we have represents not unfairly the heuristic nature of post-Conquest women's access to clerisy (writing itself, after all, was not a technology which Anglo-Norman upper-class men and women would necessarily personally exercise). Upper-class Anglo-Norman women undeniably had some experience of and access to both rule and representation, yet in the practices and symbolism of institutional monasticism, as of the secular courts, this was a contained and liminal access. Women benefited for a time from the twelfth-century expansion of religious houses, but they also suffered from the resulting late twelfth to thirteenth century backlash. The examples of female-authored Lives here discussed were not and could not be sustained for long enough, or in enough numbers, to alter the fundamentally heuristic nature of women's access to writing by the creation of normative traditions and institutions of literary production. Though a high level of socio-economic resource can overcome some gender-imposed limits for women, gender also qualifies access, with the result that each woman writer has to wield her pen as an experimenting individual rather than as the fully official inheritor of a tradition.

Nonetheless, some recovery of some women's experience is possible by interrogating the sources with new questions and assumptions. A further text which supplies a viewpoint for Queen Edith is also hagiographic: an earlier *Vita Aedwardi* dedicated to Edith and probably commissioned by her.<sup>65</sup> Here, even allowing for the text's flattery of a patron, something of Edith's own religious policy emerges: 'nowhere did [Edith] believe alms better bestowed than where the weaker sex, less skilled in building, more deeply felt the pinch of poverty, and was less able by its own efforts to drive it away' (p. 47). She therefore rebuilds the wooden church of her namesake, St Edith, in the nunnery of Wilton. (Meanwhile Edward builds St Peter's, Westminster, 'a noble edifice, worthy of the Prince of the Apostles', p. 44, but 'the prudent queen's building, because it was more modestly planned,



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was completed more quickly', p. 47.) In both her historical existence and her representation, a subject status can be recovered or legitimately reinscribed for Edith, as for her insular predecessors and successors. With this reinscription, there comes into view a history of actions, judgements, experiences, texts and projects undertaken by women couched powerfully but semi-visibly at the centre of insular society's social and genealogical structures. From the Conquest until the end of the thirteenth century, when more urbanised and continental styles of sanctity are deployed in the hagiography of Bozon, such reconstructions of the history of women and literature provide not only redress but a framework for recovering the significance of vernacular Anglo-Norman hagiography by clerks, laypeople and monks as well as women.

### NOTES

- 1 Guernes de Pont-Ste-Maxence, *La vie de saint Thomas Becket*, ed. E. Walberg (Lund: Glemp, 1922), p. 8, stanza 33. I am much indebted to two clerks for helpful comment on this chapter, Dr Carol Meale and Professor Ian Short (Birkbeck College, University of London).
- 2 A nun of Barking's Life of Edward the Confessor and Clemence of Barking's Life of St Catherine (both late twelfth century); the Life of St Audrey (Etheldreda) of Ely by Marie [of Chatteris?] (thirteenth century). For editions see under AUDREE, CATHERINE (1), EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (1), n. 4 below. None of the three has been translated to my knowledge. In collaboration with Glyn Burgess I am currently preparing a translation of the Life of St Catherine by Clemence of Barking. There may be one or two other Lives by women among the anonymous texts.
- 3 Diana B. Tyson, 'Patronage of French vernacular history writers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries', *Romania* 100 (1979), 180-222; W. R. Schirmer and U. Broich, *Studien zum literarischen Patronat im England des 12. Jahrhunderts*, Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 23 (Köln and Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1962); R. R. Bezzola, *Les Origines et la formation de la littérature courtoise en occident (500-1200)* (Paris 1944-63), Part 3, 1, *La Cour d'Angleterre comme centre littéraire sous les rois angevins (1154-1199)* (Paris, 1963); Rita Lejeune, 'Role littéraire d'Aliénor d'Aquitaine et de sa famille', *Cultura Neolatina* 14 (1954), 5-57. See also the works by M. Dominica Legge cited in n. 4 below.
- 4 The fullest study is still that by M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman in the Cloisters* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1950); see also her *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963; repr. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978). For a list of continental and insular texts

see Paul Meyer, 'Légendes en vers', *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1906) xxxiii, pp. 328-458. On the Anglo-Norman prose legendary, see Delbert W. Russell (ed.), *Légendier apostolique anglo-normand* (Paris and Montréal: Les Presses de l'université de Montréal, 1989).

A list of verse saints' lives follows, arranged in alphabetical order by saint. In addition to texts of insular composition, it includes Lives with significant insular circulation or connections. Miracle tales and pious legends are excluded, unless found as part of the text of a Life. See also now the listings (including the BHL numbers of Latin sources where known) in M. Thiry-Stassin, 'L'hagiographie en Anglo-Normand' in Guy Philippart (ed.), *Hagiographies*, *Histoire internationale de la littérature hagiographique latine et vernaculaire en Occident des origines à 1550*, t. 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1994).

AGATHA: M. Amelia Klenke (ed.), *Seven More Poems by Nicholas Bozon*, Franciscan Institute Publications Historical Series 2 (New York and Louvain: Franciscan Institute, 1951). AGNES: *ibid.* ALBAN: A. R. Harden (ed.), *La vie de saint Auban. An Anglo-Norman Poem of the Thirteenth Century*, ANTS 19 (1968). ALEXIS: Christopher Storey (ed.), *La Vie de saint Alexis: texte du manuscrit de Hildesheim (L)*, Textes Littéraires Français (Geneva and Paris: Minard, 1968), but see Alison Goddard Elliott, *The Vie de Saint Alexis in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: An Edition and Commentary*, North Carolina Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures 221 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Department of Romance Languages, 1983). AUDREE: Ö. Södergaard (ed.), *La vie seinte Audrée, poème anglo-normand du XIIIe siècle* (Uppsala: no publisher, 1955). BRENDAN: Ian Short and Brian Merrilees (eds.), *The Anglo-Norman Voyage of St Brendan* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979). CATHERINE: (I), W. MacBain (ed.), *The Life of Saint Catherine by Clemence of Barking*, ANTS 18 (1964); (II) E. C. Fawtier-Jones, 'Les vies de sainte Catherine d'Alexandrie en ancien français', *Romania* 56 (1930), 80-104; (III), BL Additional MS 40143 ff. 1-6. CHRISTINE: Klenke, *Seven More Poems*. CLEMENT: N. K. Willson (ed.), 'La vie de saint Clement', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1952); P. Meyer, 'Notice d'un manuscrit de Trinity College Cambridge contenant les vies en vers français de Saint Jean L'Aumônier et de Saint Clement, pape', *Notes et Extraits des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale* 38 (1903), 293-339 (extracts). EDMUND: (I), Judith Grant (ed.), *La Passiun de Seint Edmund*, ANTS 36 (1978); (II), H. Kjellman, *La vie Seint Edmund le Rei, poème anglo-normand du XIIe siècle par Denis Piramus* (Göteborg: Wettergren and Kerbor, 1935; repr. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1974), but see W. Rothwell, 'The Life and Miracles of St Edmund: a recently discovered manuscript', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 60 (1977-8), 135-180. EDMUND OF ABINGDON: A. T. Baker, 'La vie de saint Edmond, archevêque de Cantorbéry', *Romania* 55 (1929), 332-81. EDWARD THE CONFESSOR: (I), Ö. Södergaard (ed.), *La vie d'Edouard le confesseur, poème anglo-normand du XIIe siècle* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1948); (II), Kathryn Young-Wallace (ed.), *La Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei*, ANTS 41 (1983). ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY: Klenke, *Seven More Poems*. EUSTACE: (I), [Meyer, 'Légendes', version no. 1] P. Meyer, 'Fragment d'une vie de saint Eustache',

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*Romania* 36 (1907), 12–28; (II), [Meyer, no. 6] M. Esposito, 'La légende de saint Eustache en vers anglo-normands', *Textes et études de littérature ancienne et médiévale*, Mélanges philologiques, premier fascicule (Florence: 1921); (III, IV), [Meyer, nos. 4, 5] H. Petersen, 'Trois versions inédites de la légende de saint Eustache en vers français', *Romania* 48 (1922), 365–402, *Romania* 51 (1925), 363–96. FAITH: A. T. Baker, 'Vie anglo-normande de sainte Foy par Simon de Walsingham', *Romania* 66 (1940–41), 49–84. FRANCIS: F. Collins and A. R. Harden (eds.), ANTS (forthcoming); Janice M. Pindar, 'The Lives of St Francis of Assisi contained in MSS BN fr. 19531, 2094, 13505', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1985) (extracts); M. Thomas, *Recherches sur les légendes françaises de saint François d'Assise: édition de la version anglo-normande*, (unpublished D. ès L. thesis, Paris, 1942). GEORGE: John E. Matzke (ed.), *Les œuvres de Simund de Freine*, SATF (1909). GILES: G. Paris and A. Bos (eds.), *La Vie de saint Gilles*, SATF (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1881). GREGORY THE GREAT: Paul Meyer, 'La vie de saint Grégoire le Grand traduite du Latin par Frère Angier, religieux de Sainte-Frideswide', *Romania* 12 (1883), 145–208. GREGORY THE PENITENT: H. B. Sol (ed.), *La vie du pape saint Grégoire: huit versions françaises médiévales* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1977). JOHN THE ALMSGIVER: Kenneth Urwin (ed.), *The Life of Saint John the Almsgiver*, I, *Text*, ANTS 38 (1980); II, *Notes, Introduction and Glossary*, ANTS 39 (1981). JOHN THE BAPTIST: Paris and Bos, *La vie de saint Gilles*, pp. vi–xii. JULIANA: (I), [Meyer, no. 1] Hugo von Feilitzen (ed.), *Li ver del Juise* (Uppsala: Edv. Berling, 1883); (II) [Meyer, no. 2] Klenke, *Seven More Poems*. LAURENT: D. W. Russell (ed.), *La vie de saint Laurent*, ANTS 34 (1976). LUCY: Klenke, *Seven More Poems*. MARGARET: (I), [Meyer, no. 1] Hans-Erich Keller (ed.) and Margaret Alison Stones, *Wace: La vie de sainte Marguerite*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie 229 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1990); (II), [Meyer, no. 2] F. Spencer (ed.), *La vie de sainte Marguerite*, doctoral thesis (Leipzig: privately published, 1889); (III), [Meyer, no. 4] K. Reichl, 'An Anglo-Norman Legend of Saint Margaret', *Romania* 96 (1975), 53–66; (IV), [Meyer, no. 3] F. Spencer, 'The Legend of St. Margaret', *MLN* 5 (1890), 213–21; (V), [Meyer, no. 6] A. Joly (ed.), *La Vie de seinte Marguerite* (Paris: no publisher given, 1879), pp. 83–98; (VI) [Meyer, no. 8] P. Meyer, 'Notice du MS Sloane 1611 du Musée Britannique', *Romania* 40 (1911), 531–58; (VII), [Meyer no. 10] M. Amelia Klenke (ed.), *Three Saints' Lives by Nicholas Bozon*, Franciscan Institute Publications Historical Series 1 (St Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1947). MARTHA: Klenke, *Three Saints' Lives*. MARY MAGDALENE: (I), [Meyer, no. 1] York, Minster Library MS xvi.k.13, f. 128; (II), [Meyer, no. 2] Klenke, *Three Saints' Lives*; (III), [Meyer, no. 3.1] R. Reinsch, 'La Vie de Madeleine', *Archiv* 64 (1880), 85–94. MARY OF EGYPT: (all versions), Peter Dembowski (ed.), *La vie de sainte Marie l'Egyptienne*, Publications Romanes et Françaises (Geneva: Droz, 1977). MELOR: A. H. Diverres (ed.), 'The Life of St. Melor' in Ian Short (ed.), *Medieval French Textual Studies in Memory of T. B. W. Reid* ANTS 1 (London: ANTS, 1984), pp. 41–53. MODWENNA: A. T. Baker and Alexander Bell (eds.), *Saint Modwenna*, ANTS 7 (1947). NICHOLAS: Einar Ronsjö (ed.), *La Vie de saint Nicolas par Wace*, Etudes Romanes de Lund 5 (Lund and Copenhagen: Gleerup and Munksgaard, 1942). OSITH: A. T. Baker, 'An Anglo-French Life of St Osith', *MLR* 6 (1911), 476–502. PAPHNUTIUS: A.

- T. Baker, 'Vie de saint Panuce', *Romania* 38 (1909), 418–24. PAUL: A. T. Baker, 'An Anglo-French Life of Saint Paul the Hermit', *MLR* 4 (1908–9), 491–504. RICHARD OF CHICHESTER: A. T. Baker, 'Vie de saint Richard, évêque de Chichester', *RLR* 53 (1910), 245–396. THAÏS: R. C. Perman (ed.), 'Henri d'Arci: the Shorter Works', in *Studies in Medieval French presented to Alfred Ewart*, ed. E. A. Francis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961). THOMAS BECKET: (I), [Meyer, No. 1] E. Walberg (ed.), *La vie de saint Thomas Becket par Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence* (Lund: Glemp, 1922); (II), [Meyer, no. 2] B. Schlyter (ed.), *La Vie de saint Thomas le Martyr par Beneit, poème anglo-normand du XIIème siècle publié d'après tous les manuscrits*, Etudes Romanes de Lund 4 (Lund: Gleerup and Munksgaard, 1941); (III), MS Getty, *olim* Goethals-Vercruysse: P. Meyer (ed.), *Fragments d'une vie de saint Thomas de Cantorbéry en vers accolés*, SATF (1885).
- 5 Benedeit's *Brendan* claims in one manuscript to have been commissioned by Matilda, first queen of Henry I, and in four manuscripts by Adeliza of Louvain, Henry's second wife (BRENDAN, ed. Short and Merrilees, pp. 4–5); Matthew Paris's *Aedward* is dedicated to Eleanor of Provence, Queen of Henry III (EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (II), ed. Young-Wallace, p. 2, lines 49–62); his *Edmond* to Isabel, Countess of Arundel (EDMUND OF ABINGDON, ed. Baker, p. 343, lines 28–33 and p. 379, lines 1976–80). It has recently been argued that not Peter of Peckam's Anglo-Norman Life of Richard of Chichester but its Latin source was made for Isabel, countess of Arundel (see D. Jones, 'The Medieval Lives of Richard of Chichester', *Analecta Bollandiana* 105 (1985), 105–29, pp. 107, 119–20). Dedication may, of course, express a hope on the author's part rather than record a commission, but is evidence that Anglo-Norman noblewomen are perceived as appropriate supporters of hagiographic composition.
  - 6 LAURENT, ed. Russell, p. 35, line 76.
  - 7 THOMAS BECKET (I), ed. Walberg, Appendix 1, pp. 210–11, lines 1–5.
  - 8 For a list of manuscripts and religious houses, see Legge, *Anglo-Norman in the Cloisters*, pp. 111–16; for clerical provision of texts for lay patrons and readers see John Frankis, 'The Social Context of Vernacular Writing in Thirteenth-Century England: The Evidence of the Manuscripts', in P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (eds.), *Thirteenth-Century England I: Proceedings of the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Conference, 1985* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1986), 175–84; for an example of provision for a gentry husband and wife see Ian Short, 'The Patronage of Beneit's *Vie de Thomas Becket*', *Medium Aevum* 56 (1987), 239–56.
  - 9 Frankis, 'The Social Context', cites Oxford, Bodleian Library Digby MS 86 as an instance of lay 'upper middle class' tastes, p. 184. The hagiographic items in the manuscript (a commonplace book of over seventy pieces) are a calendar of saints, a French *litania sanctorum* prayer and NICHOLAS.
  - 10 See P. Meyer, 'Notice du MS Sloane 1611 du Musée Britannique', *Romania* 40 (1911), 541–58. St Margaret, who was supposed to have been painlessly expelled from a devouring dragon's mouth, was a patron of women in childbirth. The saint's emergence from the dragon's mouth is on ff. 147v–152v of this manuscript. On ff. 136r–137r, underneath the text of the *Régime du corps*, a different hand has added a note of each of St Anne's and her daughter's

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childbirths, perhaps also recited to women in labour. In MARGARET (II) the saint intercedes for relief 'si aucune femme ne pout enfanter / E face mun martire devant luy reconter' [if any woman has difficulty giving birth and has my passion repeated before her], Cambridge University Library MS Ee. 6.11, f. 9r, lines 26–7. Pregnant women wore Margaret texts as amulets or had them placed on their stomachs, as well as being encouraged to ingest holy charms written on apples or parchment scraps. See further Louis Carolus-Barré, 'Un nouveau parchemin amulette et la légende de sainte Marguerite patronne des femmes en couches', *Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (1979), 256–75.

- 11 The Barking *Edouard* is extant in three manuscripts, and a fragment of a fourth is known (EDWARD THE CONFESSOR II, pp. 46–8). In Rome, Vatican Reg. Lat. MS 489 (which, thanks to the generosity of La Sapienza University, Rome, I have recently been able to see) it accompanies texts for the use of a male monastic house; in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale fr. MS 1416 it replaces and supplements part of Wace's *Brut*; in London, British Library Loan MS 29/61 (*olim* Welbeck ICI) it is part of a collection made for the nunnery of Campsey. It was known on the continent, where it received a prose *remaniement* for the counts of Saint-Pol (see P. Meyer, 'Notice du ms. Egerton 745 du Musée Britannique', *Romania* 39 (1910), 532–69; *Romania* 40 (1911), 41–69).
- 12 In the large thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century collection belonging to the nunnery of Campsey (British Library Loan MS 29/61, *olim* Welbeck ICI), an inscription on f. 265v states that the book belongs to Campsey and is for reading 'a mengier' [at mealtimes]. For early thirteenth-century evidence of saints' lives being sung by *joculatores* in public, see Alison Elliott, 'The *Triumphus sancti Remacii*: Latin Evidence for Oral Composition', *Romance Philology* 32 (1978–9), 292–98. Some Anglo-Norman Lives are in metrical and stanzaic forms suitable for singing: see Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, pp. 262–3. (Legge's suggestion that MODWENNA was made for patrons or guests of Burton Abbey – i.e. for a secular or mixed courtly audience – is supported by the Life's treatment of its Latin source: see Jocelyn Price, 'La vie de sainte Modwenne: a Neglected Anglo-Norman Hagiographic Text', *Medium Aevum* 57, 1988, 170–89.)
- 13 Kate Mertes, *The English Noble Household 1250–1600* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); J. W. Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1985), esp. ch. 2, 'Courtesy and the Religious Orders'.
- 14 Such differences extend to the materials, buildings and layout of religious sites: see Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- 15 Pauline Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), chapter 10, 'Family, Marriage and Women', chapter 11, 'The Church'; Sharon K. Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Sally Thompson, *Women Religious: the Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991);

- Ezio Levi, 'Trovere ed abbazi', *Archivo Storico Italiano* 83 (1925), 45–81 (the assumption, p. 60, that Marie, author of AUDREE, was a nun at Ely needs updating, but this survey of aristocratic and courtly culture in female houses remains useful).
- 16 For early Anglo-Norman royal women and their literary circles, see Elisabeth M. C. van Houts, 'Latin Poetry and the Anglo-Norman Court 1066–1135: the *Carmen de Hastings Proelio*', *Journal of Medieval History* 15 (1989), 39–62; Therese Latzke, 'Der Fürstinnenpreis', *Mittelaltinisches Jahrbuch* 14 (1979), 22–65, esp. pp. 48–65; Lois Huneycutt, 'The *Life of St Margaret* in the reign of Matilda II', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 12 (1989), 81–97. For a recent account of Matthew Paris's relations with literary royal and noblewomen see Suzanne Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris in the Chronica Majora*, California Studies in the History of Art 21 (California and Aldershot: Scolar, 1987), pp. 5, 10, 447, 493 n.75. See also Levi, 'Trovere ed abbazi', and the works cited in n. 3 above.
  - 17 See D. Jones (cited in n. 5 above) for Isabella of Arundel and the Latin RICHARD OF CHICHESTER. In EDMUND OF ABINGDON, Matthew Paris's wording suggests that Isabella of Arundel prompted both the Latin and the French versions ('Escrite l'ay en deux langages', p. 379, line 1976). A lost Latin life of Henry I was commissioned by Adeliza of Louvain: the countess Constance Fitzgilbert paid a silver mark for this life and 'kept it and read it in her chamber', see Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, p. 28.
  - 18 Clemence of Barking comments on the textual corruption of a previous vernacular Life and proposes her own improved version (CATHERINE (I), p. 2, lines 35–46); the nun of Barking claims anonymity because her name is not yet worthy of mention in the same text as the saint's (EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (I), p. 273, line 5309); Marie includes her name so that it will be remembered (AUDREE, p. 181, lines 4619–20).
  - 19 Lives written in male houses for male religious include FAITH and GREGORY THE GREAT; the language of instruction for Latin was frequently French (see Tony Hunt, *Teaching and Learning Latin in Thirteenth Century England*, 3 vols., Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991) and W. Rothwell, 'The Role of French in Thirteenth-Century England', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 58 (1975–6), 445–66.
  - 20 Compare EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (I), p. 109, lines 1–10 with FAITH, p. 62, lines 33–48. As M. D. Legge points out ('Anglo-Norman as a Spoken Language', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 2, 1979, 108–117, p. 108), there are precedents for such apologies in Latin Lives.
  - 21 Jane Tibbetts Schulenberg, 'Sexism and the Celestial Gynaceum – From 500–1200', *Journal of Medieval History* 4 (1978), 117–33, pp. 126–7; Michael Goodich, *Vita Perfecta: The Ideal of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 25 (Stuttgart, 1982), Appendix: Master List of Thirteenth Century Saints, pp. 213–41.
  - 22 See Marc Glasser, 'Marriage in Medieval Hagiography', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 4 (1981), 3–34, pp. 19–34; Michael Goodich, 'The Contours of Female Piety in Later Medieval Hagiography', *Church History* 50 (1981), 20–32.

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- 23 Bozon is also the author of a Life (MARTHA) of a travelling and preaching woman saint (included, like ELIZABETH, in his small vernacular legendary of, principally, virgin martyrs, possibly designed specifically for a female audience). On this new model of sanctity see further A. Vauchez, *Les laïcs au moyen âge* (Paris: Cerf, 1987), p. 203 *et passim*.
- 24 For examples of female shrine-tending see EDMUND (II), pp. 117–18, lines 3035–70; JULIANA (I), p. 24, lines 1281–4; for a small selection of miracles concerning women see (for cures and economic help); EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (I), pp. 208–13, lines 3085–256, pp. 304–7, lines 6442–545; EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (II), pp. 74–6, lines 2608–679; GEORGE, pp. 85–8, lines 726–826, pp. 87–8, lines 801–26, pp. 88–9, lines 829–63; for dowry provision, NICHOLAS, pp. 116–18, lines 81–120; for behavioural control, EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (I), pp. 294–9, lines 6084–243, OSITH, pp. 496–9, lines 1065–416. For miracles *by* women see the works cited in n. 37 below. Miracles are a rich source of many kinds of information, but cannot be dealt with in the space available here: see further Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event, 1000–1215* (London: Scolar, 1982; rev. ed. Aldershot: Wildwood House, 1987).
- 25 Other classes of women are not found as saints until the later Middle Ages: see Michael Goodich, 'Ancilla Dei: The Servant as Saint in the Late Middle Ages', in Julius Kirschner and Suzanne Wemple (eds.), *Women of the Medieval World: Essays in Honor of John H. Mundy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 119–36.
- 26 On Edmund of Abingdon see C. H. Lawrence, *St Edmund of Abingdon: A Study in Hagiography and History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 108: his parents are 'neither from low or high birth, but sound people' in EDMUND OF ABINGDON (p. 344, lines 89–90); Richard of Chichester's parents are yeoman farmers ('good people in their way of life and their origins', RICHARD OF CHICHESTER, p. 318, line 71); Becket's parents were wealthy Normans, but not of high nobility (D. Knowles, *Thomas Becket*, London: Black, 1970, pp. 3–4).
- 27 The analogy of asceticism with martyrdom is a common hagiographic theme: for Anglo-Norman examples see eg. MODWENNA, p. 3, lines 57–68 (esp. lines 63–4); AUDREE, p. 65, lines 343–4; OSITH, p. 483, lines 49–54. For some representations of disturbingly misogynistic attitudes in repentant harlot and *Vitae Patrum* Lives, see THAÏS, p. 282, lines 65–84; JOHN THE ALMSGIVER, I, pp. 179–80, lines 6327–96, esp. 6349–96; PAUL, pp. 494–96, lines 3–76. I have discussed these issues further in 'The Virgin's Tale', in Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (eds.), *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 165–94. On repentant harlot Lives (further consideration of which is not possible here) see Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1 (1990), 3–32.
- 28 Christina recited the legend of St Cecilia on her enforced wedding night: see C. H. Talbot, *The Life of Christina of Markyate, A Twelfth-Century Recluse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959, repr. 1987).
- 29 See further J. Wogan-Browne, 'Saints' Lives and the Female Reader', *Forum For Modern Language Studies* 27 (1991), 314–32.

- 30 Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1987), p. xv, argues against studying female saints as sub-culture isolated from the male culture around them. *Pace* Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), the validity of such an argument does not mean that women do not exist in a gender-based sub-culture even when their particular positions involve working partnerships and friendships with men.
- 31 See further André Vauchez, 'Beata stirps: sainteté et lignage en occident aux XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles', in G. Duby and J. Le Goff (eds.), *Famille et parenté dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 1974; Rome, 1977), pp. 397-406; Nancy Vine Durling, 'Hagiography and Lineage: the Example of the Old French *Vie de saint Alexis*', *Romance Philology* 40 (1986-7), 451-69; Janice M. Pindar, 'The Intertextuality of Old French Saints' Lives: St Giles, St Evroul and the marriage of St Alexis', *Parergon* 6A (1988), 11-21; Anita Guerreau-Jalabert, 'Inceste et sainteté: La *Vie de saint Grégoire* en français (XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle)', *Annales ESC* 43 (1988), 1291-319; Simon Gaunt, 'Si les anges avaient un sexe . . . : l'hagiographie occitane et son rapport avec la poésie de troubadours', in Gerard Gouiran (ed.), *Actes du III<sup>e</sup> congrès international de l'AEIO* (Montpellier, 1993), pp. 895-906. For a broad theoretical model for the use of women in dynastic trading see Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex', in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157-210.
- 32 See, for instance, the estates treatise written by Etienne de Fougeres, Bishop of Rennes and chaplain of Henry II, for Cicely, countess of Hereford, between 1168 and 1178, R. Anthony Lodge (ed.), *Le Livre des manières* (Geneva: Droz, 1979).
- 33 See Talbot, *Life of Christina of Markyate*; Thomas Head, 'The Marriages of Christina of Markyate', *Viator* 21 (1990), 75-101.
- 34 C. N. L. Brooke, 'Marriage and Society in the Central Middle Ages', in R. B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage*, (London: Europa, 1981), pp. 31-2.
- 35 Since post-conquest Ely was a male house and since Chatteris was dedicated to Etheldreda, Marie of Chatteris is a more likely candidate than Marie of Ely for authorship of AUDREE if its author was, as seems most likely, a nun (see Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, p. 264). At line 317, moreover, AUDREE makes particular mention of 'Chateriz' (without equivalent in its Latin source at this point).
- 36 For Burton, see VCH *Staffs.* III, 199-213; for Ely, see VCH *Camb* II, 199-210, and Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); for Chich, see VCH *Essex* I, 157-62, C. Hohler, 'St. Osyth and Aylesbury', *Records of Buckinghamshire* 18, Part I (1966), 61-72, and Denis Bethell, 'The Lives of St Osyth of Essex and St Osyth of Aylesbury', *Analecta Bollandiana* 88 (1970), 75-127.
- 37 For miracles in earlier Latin Lives of foundresses written for female houses, see Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, chapter 4, 'The Cult of St. Edburga at Winchester and



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- Pershire'; Susan Millinger, 'Humility and Power: Anglo-Saxon Nuns in Anglo-Norman [Latin] Hagiography', in John A. Nichols and Lillian T. Shank (eds.), *Distant Echoes: Medieval Religious Women I*, Cistercian Studies Series 71 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 115–28; on vernacular miracles see J. Wogan-Browne, 'Queens, Virgins, and Mothers: Hagiographic Representations of the Abbess and her Powers in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Britain', in Louise Fradenburg (ed.), *Women and Sovereignty*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), pp. 14–35.
- 38 See J. Wogan-Browne, 'Rerouting the Dower', in Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth Maclean (eds.), *Power of the Weak: Studies in Medieval Women* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), pp. 27–56.
- 39 The Life of Edward must be after 1163 (the date of its source's composition) and before the death of Henry II in 1189; the Life of Catherine must antedate its oldest manuscript (late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century). Other than this, it is difficult to fix these Lives' dates or their order of composition (but see further EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (1), pp. 18–26 and Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature*, p. 60; CATHERINE (1), pp. xxiv–xxv).
- 40 See n. 1 above. The abbess of Barking held her house directly from the king, and was at this time Becket's sister (appointed in reparation by Henry II). Several of her predecessors had been members of the royal family. The two Barking Lives must have been produced under the abbacy of either Mary Becket or her immediate predecessor Adeliza.
- 41 Barking's reputation for letters was high in the seventh century, when Aldhelm addressed his *De virginitate* to its abbess and nuns (see M. Lapidge and M. Herren (trans.), *Aldhelm: the Prose Works*, Ipswich: Brewer, 1979, pp. 59–61). Its library survived until the Dissolution (see A. I. Doyle, 'Books Connected With the Vere Family and Barking Abbey', *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society* 25 (1958), 222–43) and there are indications of Latin as well as vernacular literacy unusual in post-Conquest nunneries (see e.g. Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933, repr. 1967, 1, pp. 164–7, 381–5). For Barking's abbesses, see VCH *Essex* II, p. 120.
- 42 '[My] queen, where will I find solace / After your woeful death? / How will you live without me? And how will I live without you?'
- 43 See M. M. Sheehan, 'The Influence of Canon Law on the Property Rights of Married Women in England', *Medieval Studies* 25 (1963), 109–24, pp. 113–14.
- 44 See further Catherine Batt, 'Clemence of Barking's Transformation of *Cortoisie* in *La vie de Sainte Catherine d'Alexandrie*', in *New Comparisons* 12: *Translation in the Middle Ages*, ed. and introd. Roger Ellis (1991), pp. 102–23; William MacBain, 'Five Old French Renderings of the *Passio sancte Katerine virginis*', in Jeanette Beer (ed.), *Medieval Translators and Their Craft*, Studies in Medieval Culture 25 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Western Michigan University Medieval Institute, 1989), pp. 41–65.
- 45 For the argument that both Lives are by Clemence of Barking see W. MacBain, 'The Literary Apprenticeship of Clemence of Barking', *AUMLA (Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association)* 9 (1958), 3–22. Because of the nature of the evidence, MacBain's case is possible rather than proven.

- 46 For this Life see EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (II), esp. pp. xvii–xix. The Life will henceforth be referred to in the text by line numbers from this edition.
- 47 The St Alban's *Estoire* claims to have been made for Eleanor of Provence and refers to 'li terz Henri' (line 3846); the Barking *Edouard* refers to Henry II (lines 4989–90). Both kings actively developed the Confessor's cult: see F. Barlow (ed. and trans.), *The Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster* (London: Nelson, 1962), Appendix D, 'The Development of the Cult of King Edward'.
- 48 In the absence of a critical edition of Aelred's *vita* see PL, 195, cols. 737–90. The quotation is from col. 747.
- 49 EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (II), p. 34, lines 1173–6; the formula occurs elsewhere in Anglo-Norman: see MARGARET (VI), p. 541, lines 13–14; JULIANA (I), p. 8, lines 100–4.
- 50 EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (I), p. 150 lines 1283–4.
- 51 Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, Johns Hopkins Symposia in Comparative History 11 (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), and see the works cited in n. 31 above.
- 52 Durling, 'Hagiography and Lineage', p. 454.
- 53 B. de Gaiffier d'Hestroy, 'Intactam sponsam relinquens: à propos de la vie de S. Alexis', *Analecta Bollandiana* 65 (1947), 157–95; J. Leclercq, *Monks on Marriage: A Twelfth-Century View* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), pp. 44–5; Vauchez, 'Beata stirps . . .'; *idem*, *Les laïcs*, Quatrième partie, 'La femme entre le mariage et les noces spirituelles', esp. chapter 18. Osbert of Clare in his *vita* (before 1138) compares Edward with Alexis: see M. Bloch (ed.), 'La vie d'Edouard le confesseur par Osbert de Clare', *Analecta Bollandiana* 41 (1923): 5–131, p. 75.
- 54 John T. Noonan, 'Power to Choose', *Viator* 4 (1973), 419–34; Michael M. Sheehan, 'Choice of Marriage Partner in the Middle Ages', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* new series 1 (1978), 1–33; Richard M. Smith, 'Marriage Processes in the English Past: Some Continuities', in L. Bonfield, R. M. Smith and K. Wrightson (eds.), *The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure: Essays Presented to Peter Laslett* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Head, 'The Marriages of Christina of Markyate'.
- 55 For Christina's psalter see the facsimile and discussion in Otto Pächt, C. R. Dodwell and Francis Wormald (eds.), *The St Alban's Psalter* (London: Warburg Institute, 1960). For the legend's development see Alison Elliott, *The Vie de Saint Alexis in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, pp. 28–45.
- 56 See ALEXIS, pp. 95–6, lines 56–75.
- 57 For Lesigne, see Elliott, *The Vie de Saint Alexis in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, p. 96, line 90, and for discussion of other additions and modifications, pp. 32–4, 38–9, 43–4.
- 58 Cf. OSITH, p. 485, lines 387–410; AUDREE, p. 64, lines 291–302.
- 59 For Christina and Agnes see p. 65 above.
- 60 Caroline Walker Bynum argues (' . . . And Woman His Humanity: Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages', in C. W. Bynum, Stevan Harrell and Paula Richman (eds.), *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1986, pp. 257–8), that physical humanity tends to be valued rather than reluctantly accepted in women's use of

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- religious symbolism: the Barking *Edouard* exemplifies this emphasis in earlier hagiographic literature. For a similar argument concerning other twelfth-century women writers, see Stephen G. Nichols, 'Medieval Women Writers: *Aisthesis* and the Powers of Marginality', *Yale French Studies* 75 (1988), 77-94.
- 61 Prior to Edouard's speech, Aelred's two sentences on the body are elaborated into thirty lines of commentary, considering and accepting the instability of the human body as a locus for the action of chastity (EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (I), lines 1099-130; *PL* 195, col. 747).
  - 62 'Permeability (or Lack Thereof) in Medieval Gender', paper given at the Toronto Centre for Medieval Studies' conference on 'Power of the Weak: The Authority and Influence of Medieval Women', Toronto, February, 1990 (forthcoming).
  - 63 EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (I) (Barking), p. 260, lines 4827-843; EDWARD THE CONFESSOR (II) (St Alban's), p. 106, lines 3766-76.
  - 64 See Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: the Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), chapters 5 and 6; Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1986).
  - 65 Barlow, *Life of King Edward*, pp. xv-xvii, henceforth referred to by page number in the text. For this *vita*'s account of Edith (from which Aelred's portrait in the 1163 *vita* is derived) see pp. lxvi-vii. See also Kenneth E. Cutler, 'Edith, Queen of England, 1045-1066', *Medieval Studies* 35 (1973), 222-31.

## Women in No Man's Land: English recluses and the development of vernacular literature in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries

BELLA MILLETT

How far is it possible to discuss the relationship of women and literature in a period which had no real equivalent to our modern concept of literature? There is not a great deal of semantic overlap between Modern English 'literature' and its Medieval Latin ancestor *litteratura*. Both can mean 'what is written, a body of writing'; but 'literature' is primarily associated with entertainment, *litteratura* with learning. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, *litteratura* was used only of works written in Latin; and its commonest meaning was not 'literature' even in this specialised sense, but 'knowledge of Latin letters, scholarship'.<sup>1</sup>

The extent of the semantic change here suggests the extent of the cultural changes which underlie it. Latin was the standard written language of early medieval Europe, and (although pre-Conquest Britain was a notable exception) writing in the vernacular was rare before the twelfth century. To be *litteratus* was not simply to be literate, but to be able to read and write in Latin. In the earlier Middle Ages, *litteratura* in this sense was normally (though not invariably) confined to those who had entered the religious life, and *litteratus* and *clericus* eventually came to be used as near-synonyms, as did *illitteratus* and *laicus*.<sup>2</sup> The material that the *clerici* considered worth preserving in writing was not necessarily representative of the culture of their society as a whole. Herbert Grundmann argues:

in the Middle Ages, the concepts *litteratus* and *illitteratus* distinguish not different educational levels, but different kinds of education, indeed cultural worlds,<sup>3</sup> which exist simultaneously with and alongside each other; since alongside the Latin tradition of books and writing, going back to Roman antiquity and Biblical and patristic tradition, the vernacular languages, with their own unwritten traditions of poetry, history and saga, law and custom, survived and had their own cultural impact.<sup>4</sup>

But the works belonging to these vernacular traditions, although often

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closer in form and function to what we think of as literature than the Latin works of the time, are the products of an oral rather than a written culture, and for this reason it is perhaps misleading to describe them as 'literature', a term which still retains much of its historical association with the written word. This is not to claim that there was a rigid division between Grundmann's 'two cultures'; as Ruth Finnegan has pointed out, where an oral culture exists alongside a written one, the boundaries between the two are not always clearly defined, and it becomes necessary to identify different types and degrees of orality. Finnegan distinguishes between oral composition (which may mean anything from full memorisation to improvisation during performance), oral delivery, and oral transmission, and notes that writing as well as speech may be involved at any of those stages.<sup>5</sup> Some vernacular works, such as songs, might have been composed, performed, and transmitted entirely without the use of writing; others, such as sermons, might have involved the use of writing at one or more of these stages. But it can be argued that, in the early Middle Ages at least, even those vernacular works which were committed at one stage or another to writing still belonged primarily to an oral rather than a written culture: they were normally intended for oral delivery, and designed for a listening audience rather than, like most modern literature, for a solitary reader.

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the distinction that Grundmann draws between an oral lay culture and a written clerical culture was beginning to be eroded by an increase in literacy among the laity. Malcolm Parkes, in an influential article of 1973, showed how in England literacy in Latin, the 'professional literacy' of the cleric, was supplemented from the twelfth century onwards by vernacular literacy, both the 'cultivated literacy' of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy, who began to commission the writing of vernacular works for both entertainment and instruction, and the 'pragmatic literacy' of the middle classes, acquired for the transaction of business.<sup>6</sup> M. T. Clanchy in 1979 developed Parkes's work further, concentrating particularly on 'pragmatic literacy' and its implications for administration.<sup>7</sup> One topic which both Parkes and Clanchy mention, but neither discusses in detail, is the development in this period of a vernacular religious literature, designed for the use of readers as well as listeners. The topic is much more fully explored by Grundmann in two substantial articles of 1936 and 1958;<sup>8</sup> but Grundmann takes his post-Conquest illustrations mainly from medieval France and Germany, and there is still room for a study relating Grundmann's discussion to specifically English examples.

I shall be concentrating on a group of people who do not fit neatly into either of the two cultures defined by Grundmann. These are the anchorites

of twelfth- and thirteenth-century England, and particularly the women among them. Michael Richter describes the hermits and recluses of this period as on the borderline [*Grenzlinie*] between clergy and laity, closely connected with ecclesiastical institutions, but not so formally that they were expected to conform to their usual educational requirements.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes the parent institution would record their lives in writing, and a number of written texts survive – in both Latin and in the vernacular – which seem to have been provided specifically for their use, so the extent of their literacy can be examined in some detail.

The evidence suggests that the educational level of anchorites might fall anywhere on a continuum running from complete illiteracy to a high level of scholarship. They came from a wide variety of social origins, and might have entered the anchorhold from the priesthood, the cloister or secular life.<sup>10</sup> Those who had been priests or monks before they took up the solitary life would normally have a good command of Latin letters. The hermit Bartholomew of Farne (d. 1193), who had been both, made writing and reading part of the daily routine on his island;<sup>11</sup> the recluse Wulfric of Haselbury (d. 1154), who had been ordained as a priest, copied and bound books for his own use and that of the church to which he was attached, and also employed a scribe.<sup>12</sup> Female recluses who had formerly been nuns might also be *litteratae*. The *Liber confortatorius* (c. 1082–3),<sup>13</sup> written by Goscelin of St Bertin for Eve of Wilton, who had left her convent to become a recluse, assumes a high level of learning. Goscelin expects Eve to cope with his own fairly difficult Latin, and to understand his allusions to classical literature, as well as following a demanding programme of Latin reading: not only the Scriptures, but the Scriptural commentaries of Jerome, Augustine, Gregory and others, the Lives of the Fathers, Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, Augustine's *Confessions* and *City of God*, Orosius's *History of the World*, and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*.<sup>14</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx's *De institutione inclusarum* (c. 1160),<sup>15</sup> written for his sister, who may like Eve have been a nun before she became a recluse,<sup>16</sup> is also in Latin, and he assumes that his sister will read other Latin works as part of her daily routine, although the programme of reading he sets her is more modest than Goscelin's.<sup>17</sup> At the other extreme, those anchorites who came from a lay background might have little or no education, particularly if they came from the lower social classes. In the *Liber confortatorius*, Goscelin tells an anecdote of the contemporary recluse Brihtric, a 'homo simplex et rectus' (cf. Job 1.8) [simple and upright man], living in a wooden cell built on to a church, whose frequent prayers were limited to 'quod laica ruditate didicerat [what he had learnt in his untutored rusticity]; the Lord's Prayer, the first verse of Psalm 50, and the *Gloria Patri*. The Devil took

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advantage of his lack of education, and almost succeeded in persuading him that his constant repetition of the same simple prayers was boring God:

Brithrice, adeone nullam Deo nec hominibus requiem indulges? An surdum et sine intellectu Deum arbitraris, quem uno verbo tam inerudito tam incessanter obtundis? . . . An nescis, indocte, quia magis eum prouocas tua importunitate quam placas, dicente scriptura: Verbum in oratione ne repetas? (cf. Eccles 7.15).<sup>18</sup>

Brihtric, won't you leave either God or human beings in peace? Do you think that God's hard of hearing or stupid, when you deafen him so incessantly with the same uneducated words? . . . Don't you realise, because of your lack of learning, that you're irritating him rather than pleasing him with your persistence, since the Scripture says, 'Do not use repetition in your prayers'?

Aelred, who is writing for other recluses as well as his sister, makes provision for the recluse who is unable to read ('quae litteras non intellegit'): she is expected to substitute manual work for reading, frequently breaking off to repeat the Lord's Prayer, and varying it by psalms if she knows any ('si quos psalmos nouerit interserens').<sup>19</sup>

Where anchorites were either *litterati*, like Bartholomew, Wulfric, Eve and Aelred's sister, or unable to read at all, like Brihtric and the unlettered female recluses assumed by Aelred, the cultural divisions implied by the *litteratus/illitteratus* distinction remained relatively intact. More significant for our purposes are those anchorites who occupied an intermediate territory, neither illiterate nor *litterati*. Some men belonged to this category: the hermit Godric of Finchale (d. 1170), who came to education late in life, does not seem to have progressed beyond the most elementary level of literacy – his biographer, the monk Reginald, calls him 'laicus et pene ineruditus litteris' [a layman and almost uneducated in letters] – but he could use his own Psalter, catch the drift of a conversation in Latin, and expound the Scriptures subtly in English.<sup>20</sup> It is probable, however, that most anchorites in this position were women; women were statistically much more likely than men to enter the solitary life directly from a lay background,<sup>21</sup> and at least the more well-born among them would have been taught the elements of reading. In this period the first reader, even for children not intended for the church, was the Latin Psalter; from it they would learn how to pronounce Latin correctly and to read the Psalms for themselves, and also acquire the reading skills necessary to cope with vernacular texts. Full *litteratura*, however, was usually seen as demanding rather more – the command of grammar and vocabulary necessary to read and understand other, less familiar, Latin texts and to express oneself correctly in Latin<sup>22</sup> – and those who had not progressed to this stage, even if they were able to read their own language, might still be classed as *laici et*

*illitterati*. Although the German mystic Hildegard of Bingen wrote learned Latin works, she was nevertheless described as *laica et illiterata* by a Cistercian monk who visited her towards the end of her life, in 1172;<sup>23</sup> the chroniclers attributed her understanding of the Scriptures to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost rather than her education. Through a blazing light which descended on her from heaven in 1141,

repente intellectum expositionis librorum, videlicet psalterium, ewangeliorum et aliorum catholicorum, tam veteris quam novi testamenti voluminum, sapiebat. Non autem interpretationem verborum textus eorum nec divisionem sillabarum nec cognitionem casuum aut temporum habebat; solum psalterium legere didicerat more nobilium puellarum a quadam inclusa in Monte sancti Desibodi, quod est claustrum nigrorum monachorum.<sup>24</sup>

she suddenly acquired an understanding of how the Scriptures should be expounded, that is, the Psalter, the Gospel, and other sacred books, both of the Old and New Testaments. However, she had no understanding of the vocabulary of their texts, or ability to divide syllables, or knowledge of cases and tenses; she had only learnt to read the Psalter, in the manner of upper-class girls, from a woman recluse at Disibodenberg, which is a Benedictine monastery.

It is probable that her knowledge of Latin improved as time went on, but she never completely mastered the language, and although she wrote herself in Latin she employed a series of secretaries to add the correct genders, cases and tenses.<sup>25</sup> Grundmann saw women of Hildegard's class, better educated than the male laity but less well educated than the clergy, as key figures in the development of vernacular literature: they 'overlap and blur the cultural border [*Bildungsgrenze*] between clergy and laity, and so remove the sharp distinction between Latin literacy and a non-literate "orality"'.<sup>26</sup> In this newly emerging, ill-defined borderland, female recluses could be seen as occupying a central position, not only because of their sex but because of their way of life; and there is some evidence to link them with the development of vernacular religious literature in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England.

Recluses who had been nuns might, as we have seen, qualify as *litteratae* in the fullest sense; but laywomen who entered the solitary life, and had been educated only *more nobilium puellarum* or not at all, did not necessarily develop their skills further as recluses. There was no formal educational provision for recluses as there was for nuns; although recluses sometimes underwent a probationary period, this was to test their resolution rather than for training purposes.<sup>27</sup> The authors of rules for recluses tend to adapt their prescriptions to the varying degrees of education of the women they are instructing (as Aelred does in *De institutione inclusarum*) rather than trying to educate them further. In Aelred's case, there seems to be no



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intermediate stage assumed between the recluse who is *litterata* and the one who cannot read at all. But women who had been educated *more nobilium puellarum* might well have the ability to read in the vernacular; and, since reading was seen as a normal part of the anchoritic life, there was some incentive for their spiritual directors to provide suitable reading material in a form accessible to them. It is here that there is room for a vernacular 'literature' to develop, either as a written record for private reading of material originally belonging to a primarily oral vernacular culture, or as written material designed wholly or partly for the recluses themselves.

The first process, the capture in writing of originally oral material, is the earliest that we can trace. There is an anticipation of it as early as the late eleventh century in Goscelin's *Liber confortatorius*, where he includes in his text the sensational story of the hermit Alexander, with its evident folk-tale elements; 'Quod refero,' he tells us, 'cantu et relatione, non lectione didici'<sup>28</sup> [the story I am telling I learnt not from reading, but from recitation and oral narrative]. Goscelin, however, records his story in Latin, not in the vernacular.

More significant for us is the evidence of the St Albans Psalter, prepared for Christina of Markyate in the early twelfth century. Christina was of Anglo-Saxon stock, and well born; her parents had not intended her for the religious life but for marriage, and she became a recluse (she would have preferred to be a nun) only after a long battle.<sup>29</sup> She came to the solitary life with a good reading knowledge of the Psalter,<sup>30</sup> and her biographer tells us that the Devil was sufficiently irritated by her constant reading and singing of the Psalms to send her a plague of toads:

Ap[pare]bant subito teterrima. terribili[bus] ac spaciosis orbibus oculorum. se[de]bant hinc et hinc: spalterio [*sic*] vendicantes medium locum in gremio virgi[nis] quod propemodum omnibus horis iacebat expansum in usum sponse Christi . . .

Their sudden appearance, with their big and terrible eyes, was most frightening, for they squatted here and there, arrogating the middle of the Psalter which lay open on her lap at all hours of the day for her use.<sup>31</sup>

Her initial training in letters, however, does not seem to have extended much further than this. Her biographer's account of her reply to Prior Fredebert, who was trying to persuade her to marry, suggests that her knowledge of other parts of Scripture was limited: 'Nescio scripturas quas nominasti. ex sensu vero desuper [intellect]o domine prior respondebo tibi' [I am ignorant of the scriptures which you have quoted, father prior. But from their sense I will give my answers].<sup>32</sup> While it is possible that her knowledge of Latin letters, like Hildegard of Bingen's, increased with the

years, there is no indication of this in the remainder of the *Life*; and there is another piece of evidence which suggests that she never became *litterata* in the fullest sense. It is generally agreed that the handsomely illustrated manuscript known as the St Albans Psalter was designed at least partly for her use.<sup>33</sup> It opens with forty full-page miniatures, mainly illustrating scenes from the Life of Christ, followed by the oldest surviving text of the Old French *Chançon* of St Alexis. After the *Chançon*, on the same page, comes an extract from a letter of Gregory, described here (incorrectly) as addressed to a recluse, defending the use of pictures as a means of instructing the illiterate; this is given not only in the original Latin but in a French translation. It is followed by a few more miniatures, then the Latin Psalter, some Latin prayers, and a couple more miniatures. The manuscript is a compilation which seems to have been designed for more than a single user, and which implies a hierarchy of literacy. While the Latin Psalter and prayers could have been used by anyone (including Christina) with a basic training in literacy, the lengthy untranslated Latin gloss on the first Psalm, *Beatus vir*, would require a reader who was *litteratus*. On the other hand, the story of Alexis, and still more the French translation of the passage from Gregory, seem to assume a reader who is literate in the vernacular but not necessarily in Latin; and the miniatures (as the Gregory passage explicitly points out) could be used for the instruction even of the wholly illiterate. From our point of view, the most interesting element in the compilation is the Old French component. Otto Pächt has argued convincingly that the Life of Alexis was included because of its thematic link with Christina's own story. The part of the narrative illustrated is, unusually, the beginning rather than the end, where Alexis begins his travels: 'Alexis's marriage too is enforced, he too leaves his spouse on the eve of the wedding to obey a higher calling.'<sup>34</sup> In the St Albans Psalter, the *Chançon* is introduced by a unique prologue, where the writer says that he will relate the life of Alexis, 'del quel nus aum oit lire e canter' [which we have heard read and recited], as it is 'suuerain consulaciun a cascun memorie spiritel. les quels uiuent purement sulunc casthetet. e dignement sei delitent es goies del ciel & es noces uirginels' [sovereign consolation for every pious spirit who lives in purity according to chastity, and delights worthily in the joys of Heaven and virginal nuptials].<sup>35</sup> The thematic links between the *Chançon* and Christina's life place her at the mid-point of the hierarchy of literacy implied to the volume as a whole, able to profit both from the Latin psalms and prayers and from the illustrations, but neither *litterata* nor illiterate herself. Although her first language was English, in the early twelfth century French was the normal language of polite society and courtly entertain-

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ment, and it is not surprising that the vernacular work recorded for her is in French rather than English.<sup>36</sup> What is significant is the fact that it *is* recorded in this context; as the Prologue makes clear, a work which was originally designed for public performance to a listening audience, either read aloud or recited, has been recorded in writing for the edification of an individual reader.

The early thirteenth-century rule for recluses, *Ancrene Wisse*, and the works associated with it provide a more complex example of the ways in which a vernacular literature could develop to meet the needs of recluses, showing not only the written recording of vernacular material intended originally for oral delivery – this time in English rather than in French – but the production of written material in the vernacular for the recluses themselves. The *Ancrene Wisse* itself is linked by theme, style, dialect and manuscript tradition with a number of other Middle English prose works: three lives of virgin martyrs, *Seinte Katerine*, *Seinte Margarete* and *Seinte Iuliane*, the letter on virginity *Hali Meidhad*, the allegory on the custody of the soul *Sawles Warde*, and the four lyrical meditations which are collectively described as the ‘Wooing Group’.<sup>37</sup> We know nothing about the women for whom these works were written except what the works themselves tell us, but from their internal evidence it is possible to build up a fairly full picture of their social origins, literacy and general education, and to see why the literature provided for them took the form it did.

Compared with the works for recluses already discussed, the most striking feature of *Ancrene Wisse* is the number and diversity of the readers that it assumes. Like them, it seems to have been intended in the first place for a specific audience, but even this audience is relatively large and varied. The work was originally written at the request of three well-born (*gentile*) sisters, who ‘i ne blostme of ower zuweðe uorhетен alle wor[ll]des blissen: ant bicomen ancren’<sup>38</sup> [in the flower of your youth gave up all the joys of the world and became recluses]. But it was later revised for a scattered community of recluses which had grown to twenty or more, and from the beginning the author seems to have envisaged a wider audience still, both of other recluses and (in the section on Confession) of general readers.<sup>39</sup> In the Introduction, where he explains that he is reluctant to lay down too rigid external rules, one of the reasons he gives is the varied educational background of the recluses who will use it: ‘Sum is clergesse sum nawt. ant mot te mare wurchen ant on oðer wise seggen hire bonen’<sup>40</sup> [One may be highly educated; another may not be, and will have to work more and say her prayers differently] – a prescription which clearly goes back to Aelred’s advice to his sister and her unlettered followers. The same extremes of

*litteratura* and illiteracy are assumed elsewhere in the work. In the section on silence, the author warns against the temptation to talk back to visiting priests:

Sum is se wel ilearet oðer se wis iwordet. þet ha walde he wiste hit þe sit ant spekeð toward hire. ant zelt him word aȝein word. ant forwurðeð meistre þe schulde beon ancre. ant leareð him þet is icumen hire forte learen.<sup>41</sup>

A recluse may be so well educated or so wise in her speech that she would like the man who is sitting and speaking to her to know it, and gives him back word for word, and degenerates into a teacher instead of the recluse she ought to be, and instructs the man who has come to instruct her.

But he also assumes that there are recluses who cannot cope even with the recitation of the Hours and have to fall back on the repetition of a few basic Latin prayers.<sup>42</sup> These extremes, however, seem to be comparatively hypothetical. They are phrased in indefinite terms (*sum* [one], *þe* [anyone (who)], or *hwa se* [whoever]), as possibilities rather than actual problems, and when the author addresses his primary audience directly, it is clear that they occupy the intermediate territory between illiteracy and *litteratura*. Young women who, like the original three sisters of *Ancrene Wisse*, had entered the solitary life from the outside world rather than the convent might well be expected to have been educated only *more nobilium puellarum*, and the internal evidence of the text confirms this. The main body of *Ancrene Wisse* is in English, not Latin. While the text contains a considerable amount of Latin, the author does not seem to assume that his recluses can read Latin with any ease. Most of the Latin he translates into English, and the translations are of a freedom which suggests that he did not intend them to be used as a guide to the original (sometimes they are not strictly translations at all, but glosses on the original Latin). The majority of the untranslated passages are psalms, prayers and hymns which the recluses might reasonably be expected to know. There remain a number of Latin passages which are neither translated nor glossed, and which seem to belong to a more academic world than the rest of the text: the passage at the beginning on the different concepts of what is right in grammar, geometry and theology,<sup>43</sup> a couple of references to rhetorical figures,<sup>44</sup> and some untranslated Latin references, which may appear singly or in clusters, amplifying points made in the English text. The disjunction between the level of learning assumed by the English text and that assumed by the untranslated Latin (apart from the psalms, prayers and hymns) is marked enough to suggest that the author is not catering for the possible *clergesses* among his readers but speaking over their heads to his peers, a

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university-educated clerical audience, perhaps in their capacity as possible spiritual directors.

On the other hand, the literacy of at any rate the primary audience of the work is taken for granted. The recluses are accustomed to using written texts; they use books, pamphlets and scrolls, which they sometimes share with one another,<sup>45</sup> and are expected to be able to find their way around the *Ancrene Wisse* itself. The author explains the system underlying its divisions and subdivisions in the Introduction,<sup>46</sup> and includes a number of cross-references in the body of the text.<sup>47</sup> He consistently presents it as a text to be read rather than heard;<sup>48</sup> the only mention of a listening audience is where he advises the recluses to read the section on their maids' conduct aloud to them.<sup>49</sup> The recluses can read enough Latin to say their Hours and other prayers with the help of written texts,<sup>50</sup> although their other reading is in English and French rather than Latin.<sup>51</sup> They are able to write as well as read, at any rate to the extent of copying out Latin texts,<sup>52</sup> and the author finds it necessary to forbid them to send or receive letters, or write anything, without permission: 'ȝe ne schulen senden leattres. ne underuon leattres. ne writen bute leaue'<sup>53</sup> (*writen* may mean here no more than 'copy'; this would bring it into line with the frequent prohibitions in monastic rules of unauthorised copying of texts). That they are forbidden to teach children, except in exceptional circumstances,<sup>54</sup> suggests that they would be qualified to do so.

Like the St Albans Psalter, the *Ancrene Wisse* implies a hierarchy of literacy, ranging from the *clerici* assumed by some of the untranslated Latin to the illiterate women who will need to have the book read to them, whether unlettered recluses or the recluses' maids (although some of these too can read).<sup>55</sup> But as with the St Albans Psalter, the mid-point in this hierarchy is occupied by the primary audience, a group of female readers more at home with the vernacular than with Latin. The main difference between the two is that the *Ancrene Wisse* is in English rather than French; this is probably to be explained by its later date and wider audience. By the time that it was written, in the early thirteenth century, English would have been the first language of all but the highest ranks of the aristocracy, and while its author implies that the *gentile* women who formed its primary audience could, like Christina, read French as well as English, this was not necessarily the case for all its potential readers or hearers.

Some of the other works associated with *Ancrene Wisse* also seem to have been produced for readers rather than hearers. The works of the 'Wooing Group' are soliloquies, not public addresses, pious meditations of the kind recommended in *Ancrene Wisse* for the recluses' private devotions, and it is

probable that they too were intended for recluses. The speaker in the *Ureisun of God Almihti* is a woman who has been 'licamliche iwend' [physically turned] away from the world by God;<sup>56</sup> in the *Lofsong of ure Louerde*, a dedicated virgin;<sup>57</sup> in the *Wobunge of ure Lauerd*, a woman 'sperred querfaste wiðinne fowr wahes'<sup>58</sup> [transfixed within four walls]. *Hali Meiðbad* is a general recommendation to women to choose virginity rather than marriage, with no specific reference to recluses, but it still seems to assume a solitary reader rather than an audience of listeners: the work is called an *epistel* [letter] by one of its scribes<sup>59</sup> and a *writ* [treatise] twice by the author,<sup>60</sup> and it is addressed to an individual (though generic) virgin.

The remaining works of the group, *Sawles Warde* and the three saints' lives, are harder to classify in terms of 'oral' and 'written' culture. Stylistically, they are closer to oral tradition than the works already discussed, making heavier use of rhythm and alliteration and more diffuse in their verbal texture; two of the three saints' lives, *Margarete* and *Iuliene*, are explicitly addressed to a general audience of listeners,<sup>61</sup> and the textual tradition of *Iuliene* seems to involve oral transmission as well.<sup>62</sup> All four works, however, add material on virginity to their Latin sources, and *Margarete* includes a special mention of virgins in its introductory address to the audience. Given the close links between these four works and the rest of the group, they may have been designed from the beginning with readers as well as hearers in mind, even if the readers were a secondary rather than a primary audience; in this case, they would occupy an intermediate stage in the development of a vernacular literature, bridging the gap between works designed for listeners and only subsequently recorded for readers and works specifically written for those readers.

Ann Warren has pointed out that most of the works of guidance for anchoresses which have survived to us were written for ex-nuns, not lay recluses: 'With the lone exception of the thirteenth-century *Ancrene Riwe*, all of the significant works in the genre were addressed to women who formerly had been nuns.'<sup>63</sup> It is worth noting, however, that *Ancrene Wisse* is by far the earliest of these works to be written in English; all the other works in English she cites are from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the standard of nuns' education had fallen considerably from its post-Conquest level (in Dominica Legge's words, 'the monasteries were killed as the sole centres of culture by the universities, and they dragged the nunneries down with them').<sup>64</sup> In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, works written for nuns were normally in Latin or the written language of polite society, French; it seems to have been the lay recluses, with their relative lack of formal education and wider range of social background, who were the first recipients of works of guidance in English.

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It is possible that more literature of this kind was written than has survived. The Latin *Admonitiones* written by the priest Robert for Hugh the anchorite, dated by their editor before 1215,<sup>65</sup> are based, the author tells us, on earlier works in English.<sup>66</sup> It has usually been assumed that they drew on *Ancrene Wisse*, to which they have some resemblances; but there is an increasing amount of evidence to suggest that *Ancrene Wisse* must have been written later than 1215,<sup>67</sup> and since Robert uses the plural *Anglici libri* [English books] to describe his sources, he may have been drawing on texts which have since been lost.

It is also possible that not all literature written for lay recluses has been recognised for what it is. At some point before 1272, the Franciscan friar Thomas of Hales wrote a *lune-ron* [love-song] to Christ in English verse at the request of a *puella deo dicata* [a girl consecrated to God].<sup>68</sup> It has been generally taken for granted that the *puella* was a nun, but the internal evidence of the poem would fit a lay recluse rather better. The fact that it is in English, rather than Latin or French (languages which Thomas also used in his writing),<sup>69</sup> suggests that the recipient's level of education is not high. She is able to read:

þis rym, mayde, ich þe sende  
open and wiþ-vte sel;  
Bidde ic þat þu hit vntrende  
& leorny bute boke vych del (lines 193–6)

Maiden, I send you this poem open and unsealed; I ask you to unroll it and learn it all by heart.

But she does not seem to belong to a community of readers; the poet tells her that she should learn it

Her-of þat þu be swiþe hende  
& tech hit oþer maydenes wel (lines 197–8)

so that you should become thoroughly familiar with it and teach it well to other maidens,

presumably because they cannot read it for themselves. He addresses her throughout as an individual, and, like the author of the *Wobunge of ure Lauerd*,<sup>70</sup> pictures her in solitary but not silent meditation:

Hwenne þu sittest in longynge,  
drauh þe forþ þis ilke wryt;  
Mid swete stephne þu hit singe . . . (lines 201–3)

When you sit in longing, take out this text, and sing it sweetly.

It is possible that we have here a further example of the spiritual guidance

of recluses by friars so warmly recommended by the author of *Ancrene Wisse*.<sup>71</sup>

Were any of these lay recluses producers as well as consumers of the new vernacular literature? Eikenkel suggested that the *Wobunge of ure Lauerd* might be the work of one of the three sisters mentioned in *Ancrene Wisse*, and W. M. Thompson, in his edition of the 'Wooing Group', agreed with the possibility of 'a gifted woman writer – though not necessarily one of the three anchoresses'.<sup>72</sup> Alexandra Barratt<sup>73</sup> has rightly pointed out the logical flaws of the 'unwritten law of literary scholarship, so deeply embedded that it does not have to be made explicit, that anonymous texts are assumed to be written by males', a law based on the premise, 'If most named authors are men, then so too are most anonymous writers.' Even if we accept this premise (which perhaps, as she says, we should not, since women might have more reason than men for concealing their authorship), the argument 'becomes circular and self-fulfilling . . . any one anonymous work is almost certain to be assigned to a male writer; and that attribution itself becomes part of the argument for assigning the next anonymous writing to a male. The burden of proof is always left with those who wish to argue for a female writer.' But it does not necessarily follow from this that we are entitled to people the gaps in our knowledge with a phantom army of women writers; the assumption of female authorship remains no more than wishful thinking unless we are prepared to accept the burden of proof. The problem with the 'Wooing Group' is that we have no evidence for female authorship which cannot be interpreted in other ways, and some evidence against it. The writer of the *Wobunge of ure Lauerd* concludes:

Prei for me mi leue suster. þis haue i writen þe for þi þet wordes ofte quemen þe heorte to þenken on ure lauerd And for þi hwen þu art on eise carpe toward iesu ant seie þise wordes. ant þenc as tah he heng biside þe blodi up o rode . . .

(lines 645–55)

Pray for me, my dear sister; I have written this for you because words often encourage the heart to contemplate God. And therefore in your free time speak to Jesus and say these words, and imagine him hanging beside you bloodstained on the Cross . . .

What this suggests is that the female speaker in the *Wobunge*, and by implication the female speakers in the other works of the group, need not be authorial; they may be no more than *personae* appropriate for the women using the meditations. The meditations also show a closer acquaintance with Latin religious literature than we have any evidence for among the women for whom *Ancrene Wisse* was written;<sup>74</sup> and since the author of *Ancrene Wisse* (unlike some spiritual directors of women) actively discour-



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ages his charges from most kinds of teaching and counselling, as well as from unsupervised writing,<sup>75</sup> female authorship of the 'Wooing Group' seems on balance unlikely.

The lay anchoresses of the twelfth and thirteenth century seem to have been significant for the development of vernacular literature mainly because of their intermediate position between *laici* and *clerici*, illiterates and *litterati*. Since reading was one of the occupations expected of the recluse, there was an incentive for their spiritual directors to supply them with (as *Ancrene Wisse* puts it)<sup>76</sup> 'reading in English or French' and 'holy meditations'; and their way of life influenced the nature of the material they were given. Throughout the Middle Ages, it was more usual for vernacular works to be listened to than read, and we cannot always be sure that either lay patrons or nuns read the works that were written for them rather than hearing them read aloud by someone else; but recluses by definition were solitary readers, and this is sometimes reflected in the works that were provided for their use. In the texts produced for recluses in this period, we see not only the recording in writing of works originally intended for oral delivery, but the development of something still closer to our modern concept of 'literature', vernacular works composed with readers rather than hearers in mind.

### NOTES

- 1 See *Novum Glossarium Mediae Latinitatis ab anno DCCC usque ad annum MCC*, fasc. 'L', ed. Franz Blatt (Hafniae: Einar Munksgaard, 1957), pp. 166–7, s.v. *litteratura*.
- 2 See Herbert Grundmann, 'Litteratus–illitteratus: Der Wandel einer Bildungsnorm vom Altertum zum Mittelalter', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 40 (1958), 1–65, and M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), chapter 7, 'Literate and Illiterate'.
- 3 'nicht verschiedene Bildungsgrade, sondern verschiedene Bildungsweisen, ja Bildungswelten': the English translation cannot fully reflect the linking of 'education' and 'culture' implicit in *Bildung*.
- 4 Grundmann, 'Litteratus–illitteratus', pp. 13–14.
- 5 Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 16–24.
- 6 M. B. Parkes, 'The Literacy of the Laity', in David Daiches and Anthony Thorlby (eds.), *The Medieval World* (London: Aldus Books, 1973), pp. 555–77.
- 7 *From Memory to Written Record*; see n. 2 above.
- 8 Herbert Grundmann, 'Die Frauen und die Literatur im Mittelalter: ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Entstehung des Schrifttums in der Volkssprache', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 26 (1936), 129–61, and 'Litteratus–illitteratus', see n. 2 above.

- 9 Michael Richter, *Sprache und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter: Untersuchungen zur mündlichen Kommunikation in England von der Mitte des elften bis zum Beginn des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 18 (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1979), p. 78.
- 10 See Ann K. Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 18–29.
- 11 'Sive . . . scribebat, sive legebat . . .': *Vita Bartholomaei Farnensis*, by Geoffrey, a monk of Durham, in Thomas Arnold (ed.), *Symeonis monachi opera omnia*, Rolls Series 75, 1 (1882), Appendix 2, p. 301.
- 12 Dom Maurice Bell (ed.), *Wulfric of Haselbury: by John, Abbot of Ford*, Somerset Record Society 47 (1933), chapters 27–9.
- 13 C. H. Talbot (ed.), 'The Liber Confortatorius of Goscelin of Saint Bertin', *Analecta monastica* series 3, *Studia Anselmiana* 37 (1955), 1–117.
- 14 Talbot (ed.), 'Liber confortatorius', Bk 3, pp. 80–1.
- 15 Anselm Hoste and C. H. Talbot (eds.), *Aelredi Rievallensis opera omnia 1: opera ascetica*, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis* 1 (Turnholt, Belgium: Brepols, 1971), pp. 634–82.
- 16 We know nothing about Aelred's sister apart from the little he tells us about her in *De institutione inclusarum*, not even her name; but Ann K. Warren reads chapter 3 (Hoste and Talbot (eds.), *Aelredi opera* 1, p. 639), 'relictis omnibus tuis pro Christo' [since all your property has been renounced for Christ] as implying a nun's vow of poverty: 'The Nun as Anchoress: England 1100–1500', in John A. Nichols and Lillian T. Shank (eds.), *Distant Echoes: Medieval Religious Women* 1, *Cistercian Studies Series* 71 (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1984), p. 202.
- 17 Hoste and Talbot (eds.), *Aelredi opera* 1, chapter 9, p. 645.
- 18 Talbot (ed.), 'Liber confortatorius', Bk 2, p. 67.
- 19 Hoste and Talbot (eds.), *Aelredi opera* 1, chapter 9, pp. 645–6.
- 20 See J. Stevenson (ed.), *Libellus de vita et miraculis S. Godrici, heremitaie de Finchale*. *Auctore Reginaldo monacho Dunelmensis*, Surtees Society 20 (1845), pp. 41–2, 179–80; and the discussions in Richter, *Sprache und Gesellschaft*, pp. 80–6, and Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, pp. 188–91.
- 21 See Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, pp. 22–5.
- 22 See Philip of Harvengt's description of the *litteratus*, quoted in Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 181, n. 31. Clanchy stresses (pp. 180–1) that *litteratus* in this period is a relative term, and its exact meaning is determined by the standards of the person using it. The point can be illustrated by Abelard's complaint in one of his letters to Heloise: 'Scire quippe litteras in claustris dicuntur, quicunque illas proferre didicerunt. Qui profecto, quantum ad intelligentiam spectat, se nescire legem profitentes, librum qui traditur habent signatum aequè ut illi, quos illitteratos ibidem dicunt' (*Ep.* 8, *PL* 187, col. 310). [In the cloister those are said to know letters who have learned to pronounce them; but as far as understanding them is concerned, those who admit they cannot read have a book given to them which is just as much sealed as it is for those whom they call illiterate (trans. Betty Radice, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974, p. 264)].

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- 23 *Ex chronico quod dicitur Willelmi Godelli*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptorum, 26 p. 198.
- 24 *Chronica Albrici Monachi Trium Fontium*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptorum, 23 p. 834 (see also p. 842); there is a similar passage, probably going back to a common source, in the *Annales stadenses*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptorum, 16 p. 330. Both these chronicles date from the early thirteenth century.
- 25 See Marianna Schrader and Adelgundis Führkötter, *Die Echtheit des Schrifttums der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen: Quellenkritische Untersuchungen* (Cologne/Graz: Böhlau-Verlag, 1956), pp. 180–4.
- 26 Grundmann, 'Die Frauen und die Literatur', p. 139.
- 27 See Warren, *Anchorites and their Patrons*, chapter 3, especially pp. 71–2.
- 28 Talbot (ed.), 'Liber confortatorius', Bk 4, p. 104.
- 29 See C. H. Talbot (ed. and trans.), *The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Recluse*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).
- 30 See Talbot (ed.), *Christina of Markyate*, pp. 92, 93.
- 31 *Ibid.*, pp. 98, 99.
- 32 *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 61.
- 33 See Otto Pächt, C. R. Dodwell and Francis Wormald (eds.), *The St Albans Psalter*, Studies of the Warburg Institute 25 (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1960), and Christopher J. Holdsworth, 'Christina of Markyate', in Derek Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women*, Studies in Church History: Subsidia 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), pp. 189–95.
- 34 Pächt, Dodwell and Wormald (eds.), *The St Albans Psalter*, p. 136.
- 35 *Ibid.*, plate 35.
- 36 Christopher Holdsworth notes that 'her mother's name was Beatrice which sounds "French"' ('Hermits and the Powers of the Frontier', *Reading Medieval Studies* 16, 1990, 58); her intimate friendship with Abbot Geoffrey of St Albans, who was a Frenchman, also suggests that she could speak French.
- 37 Texts can be found in the following editions, from which references are taken unless otherwise specified: J. R. R. Tolkien (ed.), *The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe: Ancrene Wisse*, edited from MS. Corpus Christi College Cambridge 402, EETS OS 249 (1962); S. R. T. O. d'Ardenne and E. J. Dobson (eds.), *Seinte Katerine*, EETS SS 7 (1981); Frances M. Mack (ed.), *Seinte Marherete: þe Meiden ant Martyr*, EETS OS 193 (1934); S. R. T. O. d'Ardenne (ed.), *þe Liþlade ant te Passiun of Seinte Iulene* (1936), rpt. EETS OS 248 (1961); Bella Millett (ed.), *Hali Meiðhad*, EETS OS 284 (1982); *Sawles Warde*, in J. A. W. Bennett and G. V. Smithers (eds.), *Early Middle English Verse and Prose* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn. 1968), pp. 246–61; and the 'Wooing Group' in W. Meredith Thompson (ed.), *þe Wobunge of Ure Lauerd*, EETS OS 241 (1958). The Corpus text of *Ancrene Wisse* is translated as a whole in M. B. Salu (trans.), *The Ancrene Riwe* (London: Burns & Oates, 1955), and there are interleaved translations of *Hali Meiðhad*, *Seinte Margarete*, *Sawles Warde* and *Ancrene Wisse* Parts 7 and 8 in Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (eds.), *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and 'Ancrene Wisse'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

- 38 Mabel Day (ed.), *The English Text of the Ancrène Riwle, Edited From Cotton Nero A. XIV*, EETS OS 225 (1952), p. 85.
- 39 See E. J. Dobson, *Origins of Ancrène Wisse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), and Bella Millett, 'The Audience of the Saints' Lives of the Katherine Group', *Reading Medieval Studies* 16 (1990), 127-56, for more detailed discussion of the evidence for the audience of *Ancrène Wisse* and the works related to it.
- 40 Corpus MS f. 2a/12-13 (MS has *moten* for *mot te*).
- 41 Corpus MS f. 15b/27-16a/3.
- 42 Corpus MS f. 12a/3-11.
- 43 Corpus MS f. 1a/4-9; see also f. 1b/6-8.
- 44 Corpus MS f. 1a/25-6, f. 20a/6.
- 45 See Corpus MS ff. 10b/21-2, 66a/18-19, 67b/2-4, 77a/27.
- 46 Corpus MS f. 4a/17-4b/15.
- 47 Corpus MS ff. 8b/27-8, 50b/10-11, 81b/3-5, 111a/11-14, 21-2, 115a/15-18.
- 48 E.g. Corpus MS ff. 2b/13-16, 23-5, 117a/27-8.
- 49 Corpus MS f. 116b/16-18.
- 50 See Corpus MS ff. 10b/21-2, 11b/5-6; and Robert W. Ackerman and Roger Dahood (eds.), *Ancrène Riwle: Introduction and Part 1*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 31 (Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1984), pp. 33-4.
- 51 See Corpus MS f. 11a/21-3.
- 52 See Corpus MS f. 6a/2.
- 53 Corpus MS f. 114/25-6.
- 54 Corpus MS f. 114b/20-5.
- 55 See Corpus MS f. 114b/21-3; 115b/9-10, '3ef heo ne con o boke: segge bi pater nostres. ant bi auez hire ures' [if she cannot read, she should say her Hours with Our Fathers and Hail Marys] suggests that at least some maids could use a Latin service book.
- 56 Lines 21-2 (cf. *On Ureisun of ure Louerde*, lines 18-19). Her sex is suggested by the feminine pronoun in line 31 (cf. *On Ureisun of ure Louerde*, line 27).
- 57 Lines 84-8.
- 58 Lines 591-3.
- 59 Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley MS 34, f. 52r; see N. R. Ker (ed.), *Facsimile of MS. Bodley 34*, EETS OS 247 (1960).
- 60 4/12, 19/27.
- 61 See Millett, 'Audience of the Saints' Lives', pp. 132-3.
- 62 See Bella Millett, 'The Textual Transmission of *Seinte Iulienne*', *Medium Aevum* 49 (1990), 41-54.
- 63 Warren, 'The Nun as anchoress', p. 202.
- 64 M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman in the Cloisters: The Influence of the Orders upon Anglo-Norman Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1950), p. 51.
- 65 Livario Oligier (ed.), 'Regulae tres reclusorum et eremitarum Angliae saec. XIII-XIV', *Antonianum* 3 (1928), 151-90; see the discussion of dating on p. 154.
- 66 The author tells us: 'Diversas sententias de anglicis [MS angelicis] libris in latinam linguam transferre studui' (p. 184) [I have taken pains to translate

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various passages from English books into Latin]. (I have accepted Oligier's emendation here).

- 67 See Dobson, *Origins of Ancrone Wisse*, pp. 15–16; there also seems to be a significant connection between *Ancrone Wisse* and the version of the Premonstratensian Rule current between roughly 1216 and 1236–8 (see A. H. Thomas, 'Une version des statuts de Prémontré au début du xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Analecta Praemonstratensia* 55 (1979), 153–70).
- 68 See Carleton Brown (ed.), *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), no. 43.
- 69 See Legge, *Anglo-Norman in the Cloisters*, pp. 84–5.
- 70 See p. 98 below.
- 71 See Corpus MS f. 16b/13–17a/1; and cf. f. 112b/10–12.
- 72 Thompson (ed.), *Wobunge of ure Lauerd*, p. xxii; see also p. xxi.
- 73 Alexandra A. T. Barratt, "'The Flower and the Leaf'" and "'The Assembly of Ladies': Is There a (Sexual) Difference?", *Philological Quarterly* 66 (1987), 1–24; see especially pp. 1–2.
- 74 See Elizabeth Salter, *English and International: Studies in the Literature, Art and Patronage of Medieval England*, eds. Derek Pearsall and Nicolette Zeeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 73–4.
- 75 Corpus MS ff. 15b/27–16a/8, 17b/24–18a/6, 114b/25–6.
- 76 Corpus MS f. 11a/22–3.

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‘Women talking about the things of God’: a late  
medieval sub-culture<sup>1</sup>

FELICITY RIDDY

A new consensus about the nature of Chaucer's initial readership in the 1380s and 1390s seems to have emerged over the last decade or so. The old courtly audience of leisured aristocrats, male and female, that used to be extrapolated from the *Troilus* frontispiece has given way to another, composed of readers rather than listeners, gentry rather than nobility: busy administrators, soldiers, men of affairs. This new initial audience – the Chaucer circle, as it is now called – is predominantly, perhaps even exclusively, male.<sup>2</sup> Moreover the most recent work by a historian on the household of Richard II emphasises its masculinity: we have been shown that it was composed almost entirely of men, that they ate their meals in shifts and slept at night wherever they could find floor-space. Even senior members of the household had to bed down on pallets in the passageways and vestibules.<sup>3</sup> The whole place presumably smelt of horses, sweat and unwashed feet.

The Chaucer circle, most of whom worked in this unappetising ambience, are members of a civil service sub-culture: they are laymen who know French and Latin, they write as well as read (many are poets themselves), they are oriented towards the public world, they share a class outlook and, as readers of Chaucer, form a textual community. Nevertheless it would be a mistake, I think, to imagine that being members of that textual community was not complicated; Chaucer's open-ended poetry does not seem to be either the product or the source of an unproblematic relationship with any reader. In particular we should not underestimate the difficulties presented even to this earliest group by the *Canterbury Tales*, with its multiple voices, its dispersed selves, and its mixture of inward and alien perspectives. For if Chaucer writes out of and for a particular sub-culture, he also gives access to a number of others: among the most alien are, not surprisingly, those represented in tales told by women, and particularly the tales of the Prioress and the Second Nun who come from

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closed female communities (with, no doubt, their own characteristic odours).

Both of these tales, unlike any of those told by the male religious, are devotional: a miracle of the Virgin and a saint’s life. Of the many saints he might have used, Chaucer has chosen in St Cecilia one who played a particular role in women’s piety. Women readers responded to the story of St Cecilia in a variety of ways: in the twelfth century she provided a role model for Christina of Markyate, married against her will after she had taken a vow of virginity. Christina told Cecilia’s story to her husband on their wedding night in order to persuade him not to consummate their marriage.<sup>4</sup> For the Franciscan nun to whom the early fourteenth-century author of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi* addressed his work, St Cecilia, who ‘always carried the gospel of Christ hidden in her bosom’,<sup>5</sup> represents that inner-directed meditation on the life of Christ which the text aims to cultivate. Chaucer’s exact contemporary, Julian of Norwich, used the story of St Cecilia differently: it was the three wounds in Cecilia’s neck that she remembered, and which led her to pray, similarly, for the three wounds of contrition, compassion and ‘wylfulle langgyng to god’ that are the starting-point of her revelations.<sup>6</sup> In the fifteenth century, Osbern Bokenham, a copy of whose collection of thirteen women saints’ lives was presented to a nunnery in 1447, offers Cecilia as a pattern of the mixed life of action and contemplation adumbrated by Walter Hilton and put into practice by devout women, including the appropriately named Cecily, duchess of York.<sup>7</sup>

The Prioress’s tale – the Marian miracle of the Chorister Killed by Jews<sup>8</sup> – also seems to have a secure place in women’s culture. Miracles of the Virgin occur in Latin and French as well as English, and were not only read by women, of course. Latin analogues of this particular tale can be found in at least two different contexts in the late fourteenth century. The Chorister Killed by Jews occurs in *mariales*, collections of miracles of the Virgin in Latin, which were – we can assume from the language – read by clerics,<sup>9</sup> and it is also included on its own in miscellanies assembled by members of male religious orders.<sup>10</sup> All this seems to show that the story the Prioress tells has a place in masculine clerical culture and, in particular, forms part of the repertoire of preachers. Chaucer could as easily have allocated it to the Friar or the Monk, it seems. Instead he preferred to feminise it and juxtapose it with the studiously amoral Shipman’s Tale, which it follows in all the manuscripts. It does not seem possible to move from the Shipman’s Tale to the Prioress’s without being made aware of the fact that they do not use the same language and do not address the same imagined communities. *Fabliaux* are comic and reductive ends in themselves, whereas the

significance of miracle-stories depends on the system of belief which they exemplify; detached from that system of belief, they are merely absurd or grotesque. The Shipman's Tale presents a world in which such detachment is not only possible but eminently plausible, the world of a merely human 'good felaweship'. The Prioress's Tale reads back into the Shipman's, of course, the sensibility of her tale exposing the calculation that passes for feeling in his; but the effect of the juxtaposition is, nevertheless, to acknowledge that the values of neither are universal. Both are, in effect, sub-cultural.

The difference in the two tellers' gender emphasises the contrast between them. The Prioress's femininity is part of Chaucer's target, and it is appropriate therefore that the only surviving fourteenth-century English analogue to the Prioress's Tale should occur in the Vernon manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library Eng. poet. MS a. 1). This book, which was compiled at the same time as Chaucer was writing the *Canterbury Tales*, is mostly in English, with a little French and Latin, and, it has been plausibly argued, was written for a community of nuns or a household of devout gentlewomen.<sup>11</sup> It now contains a group of nine (originally forty-one) illustrated miracles of the Virgin in English verse, including the story of the Chorister Killed by Jews, which is preceded by prayers to the Virgin and followed by the northern homily cycle; its piety is reinforced, not challenged, and its unthinking anti-semitism is echoed elsewhere in the volume.<sup>12</sup>

The Vernon manuscript seems to provide substantial evidence for the existence of a certain kind of female readership, for which the Prioress can be said to function as a metonym. The book contains a strikingly large number of works written specifically for women readers, opening with an abridgement of Aelred of Rievaulx's *De institutione inclusarum*, addressed to his sister, a nun. Section iv contains Rolle's *Form of Living*, written for Margaret Kirkby, a nun of Hampole who became a recluse at Anderby; his *Commandment*, also written for Margaret Kirkby or another Hampole nun, and his *Ego dormio*, composed for a woman entering the religious life;<sup>13</sup> *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost*, which instructs the lay reader how to build a nunnery in his or her heart and is translated from a French text originally destined for women; a version of *Ancrene Riwe*, which was written for a group of female recluses; Book I of Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*, which though here addresses a 'Ghostly brother or sister' was originally intended for a woman. The manuscript contains two other works by or attributed to Hilton, whose writings were owned by nuns throughout the fifteenth century and beyond.<sup>14</sup> The A-text of *Piers Plowman*, also in this section, is not only the shortest of all the versions but the most accessible to those not



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literate in Latin. Other Vernon texts, such as Grosseteste's *Castle of Love*, were, we know, read by devout women, and Carol Meale, in her recent study of the Marian legends in the Vernon manuscript, argues that in the later Middle Ages vernacular miracles of the Virgin were part of a specifically female piety.<sup>15</sup>

This piety is one which a number of writers have been at pains to argue was controlled by men. A. I. Doyle, writing of the possibility that the Vernon manuscript was assembled for a convent of nuns, argues that nevertheless 'it was the clergy, religious or secular, who took responsibility for the guidance of inmates of such convents . . . and where provision of suitable reading matter probably started'.<sup>16</sup> Now it is true that the works I have just described were all written for women by male clerics. Nevertheless we should not assume that women were merely passive recipients of books, or that they could not have taken the initiative in the process of translating from Latin into the vernacular. The assiduous pastoral activity in the two centuries after the fourth Lateran council in 1215, which is often described as if it were entirely generated from the centre, could hardly have taken place if the laity had not been avid to learn. In the relation between the male clerks and their women readers it must often have been difficult to tell who followed and who led. A case in point is Richard Rolle, who had a series of female protectors and disciples, and whose move from the fantastical, introverted Latin of his early years to the expository English prose of his last decade must have been brought about, in part at least, by the expressed needs of his women friends. It is women who in a sense socialise Rolle into writing his vernacular epistles, whose spirituality obliges the elusive and eccentric solitary to discover his own capacity for teaching in English on the contemplative life. *The Form of Living* has the easy directness of someone talking to an old friend:

Sere men in erth has sere gyftes and graces of God; bot þe special gift of þas þat ledes solitary lyf es for to lufe Jhesu Criste. Þow says me: 'All men lufes hym þat haldes his comawndementes'. Soth it es. Bot all men þat kepes hys byddyngs kepes noght also hys cownsaile . . .<sup>17</sup>

The entire shape of Rolle's writing life reconfirms those symbolic gestures of feminisation that he made as a young man when he fled into a Yorkshire wood wearing his sister's dress, and later appeared in a local church and prayed in the place 'where the wife of a certain worthy esquire . . . was accustomed to pray'.<sup>18</sup>

The women for whom the Vernon manuscript may well have been assembled would have had their own sources and networks for procuring texts. There is abundant evidence, both from surviving manuscripts and

wills, that women gave one another books. Dame Matilda de Clare gave *Ancrene Riwle* to Canonsleigh Abbey in the 1280s;<sup>19</sup> about a century later prioress Margaret Sylemon left to Nuneaton Priory a book containing Grosseteste's *Château d'Amour* owned by herself 'et discipulas suas';<sup>20</sup> in 1394 Maria, Lady Roos and Oreby left her kinswoman Isabella Percy a copy of what is probably Henry of Lancaster's *Livre des Seyntz Medicines*,<sup>21</sup> and when she died in 1401 Isabella Percy left Katherine Howme 'unum librum de Sancto Spiritu';<sup>22</sup> in 1408 Gilemota Carreeke left Alice Bows a copy of *The Ghost of Guy* in English and a French version of *Barlaam and Josaphat*;<sup>23</sup> in 1420 dame Matilda Bowes, a widow, left her god-daughter Matilda, daughter of lord Hilton, 'j romance book is called ye gospelles', which may be *La Estorie del Evangelie* in French;<sup>24</sup> in 1438 Alienora Roos left her copy of the first book of Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* to her nephew's wife and her 'Maulde buke' (Mechtild of Hackeborn's *The Book of Ghostly Grace*) dame Joan Courtenay, who was probably a nun;<sup>25</sup> in 1448 dame Agnes Stapleton, widow of Sir Brian Stapleton, left to Elena Ingelby her French saints' lives, to the abbess of the Poor Clares at Denny a crucifix and a French book, a copy of 'Bonaventura' to the nuns of Sinningthwaite, a *Prick of Conscience* to the nuns of Arthington, *The Chastising of God's Children* to the nuns of Esholt, and 'Vice and vertues' to the nuns of Nun Monkton.<sup>26</sup> Before her death in 1462 dame Margaret Hasley gave a copy of *Pore Caitif* to dame Anne Basynburne, of the London house of Franciscan nuns;<sup>27</sup> Margaret Scrope, a nun of Barking, gave *The Mirror of the Life of Christ* (which had previously been owned by abbess Sibilla de Felton) to mistress Agnes Gowl dewell.<sup>28</sup> Margaret Purdans, a Norwich widow who died in 1481, left *The Doctrine of the Herte* to the Franciscan nuns of Bruisyard, her 'English book of Saint Bridget' to the Benedictine nuns of Thetford, and a copy of Hilton to Alice Barly.<sup>29</sup> Sometime before 1482 dame Mald Wade, prioress of Swyne, gave a book containing *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God*, and texts of Hilton and Catherine of Siena, to dame Joan Hyltoft, a nun of Nun Cotham.<sup>30</sup> Henry VII's mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort, countess of Richmond, commissioned Wynkyn de Worde to print Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* in 1494, and she and her daughter-in-law Elizabeth of York jointly presented a copy of it to Mary Roos, one of Elizabeth's ladies. (This was only one of a number of texts printed by Caxton, de Worde and Pynson at Margaret Beaufort's instigation).<sup>31</sup> On her death in 1498 Thomasin Hopton left to her granddaughters Elizabeth Knevet and Thomasin Sidney, respectively, a book of saints' lives and a life of the Blessed Virgin.<sup>32</sup> In the early sixteenth century Betryce Chaumbir's copy of a book containing *The Prick of Love*

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(commonly attributed to Hilton) and *Pore Caitif* passed on her death to ‘sustir Emme Wynter and to systir Denyse Caston, Nonnes of Dartford’.<sup>33</sup>

The relationships revealed by at least five of these gifts are worth exploring further: the *discipulae* of Margaret Sylemon, who was prioress of Nuneaton in Warwickshire between 1367 and 1386, must have been novices or younger nuns who were her pupils, and with whom she may have used Grosseteste’s *Château d’Amour* and the other French texts in McClean 123 as a reader.<sup>34</sup> Matilda Bowes’s gift to the younger Matilda, whom she describes as ‘filiola’, is a reminder that the institution of ‘godsib-rede’, or spiritual kinship with one’s god-children and their parents, provided women with social networks that crossed the generational boundaries, extending both motherhood and sisterhood. Thomasin Hopton made a number of bequests to other Thomasins besides Thomasin Sidney, which suggests that she was particularly in demand as a godmother.<sup>35</sup> The aristocratic trio linked by de Worde’s Hilton forms a small reading community who support one another in their prayers: ‘I pray you pray for me / Elysabeth ye quene’, writes one donor; ‘Mastres Rosse y truste yn youre prayeres / the whiche y pray yow y may be partener / of. Margaret R the kynges / modyr’, writes the other.<sup>36</sup> We cannot deduce the relationship between Betryce Chaumbir, Emma Wynter and Denyse Caston, but the inscription in Downside Abbey 26342 seems to imply that the latter two are younger women who will eventually own the book jointly. Now we know from the records of episcopal visitations to nunneries that one of the features of convent life which is regularly criticised by the bishops is the way in which, from the thirteenth century on, religious communities were allowed to fragment into separate *familiae* or households.<sup>37</sup> Roberta Gilchrist has assembled archaeological evidence which suggests that in some cases such *familiae* actually lived in separate buildings, emphasising what she calls the ‘increasingly domestic personality of nunneries’.<sup>38</sup> Some of these *familiae* may well have formed reading communities, their members teaching one another, sharing books and discussing them together. They have their lay counterparts in aristocratic domestic arrangements in which the ‘inner’ household was differentiated from the ‘riding’ household, a small but mobile group of servants who would accompany a magnate on his travels about his own or the king’s business.<sup>39</sup> Even in gentry families husbands and wives must have led largely separate lives, with the husbands frequently away in the service of their lords and the wives left at home to cultivate those networks of female friendships for which almost the only remaining evidence is to be found in their wills. More obvious parallels with the *familiae* of nunneries can be seen

in the household routines of vowesses, women such as Lady Margaret Beaufort<sup>40</sup> and, from a generation before hers, Cecily, duchess of York, Edward IV's mother, who was widowed in 1460 when she was in her mid-forties. Her household ordinances reveal that during dinner she would listen to readings from such works as Hilton's *Mixed Life*, 'Bonaventure' (presumably a version of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi*), the apocryphal *Infancy of the Saviour*, saints' lives from the *Legenda aurea* and the writings of women visionaries – Mechthild of Hackeborn, Catherine of Siena and Bridget of Sweden.<sup>41</sup> During supper the duchess of York would repeat to the others present what she had heard read earlier in the day and after supper would relax with her gentlewomen.<sup>42</sup> These women companions, who, as I have already suggested, seem to have been trying to put into practice Hilton's model of the mixed life, form a reading community of precisely the kind which, seventy or eighty years earlier, might have commissioned the Vernon manuscript. We do not know how less aristocratic vowesses ordered their daily routines: women like dame Joan Clopton, whose husband, Sir William, a substantial member of the Worcestershire gentry, died in 1419 when she was probably still in her thirties. Her brass in Quinton church, Warwickshire, makes it clear that she devoted herself to works of charity: 'For thee, Jesus, she lived; she was generous to hapless children and unstinting to strangers. She gave as much to poor churches as to great ones'.<sup>43</sup> Nor do we know about the glimpsed lives of the two or three groups of devout women whom Norman Tanner has documented in mid fifteenth-century Norwich. These women lived together, apparently under vows of poverty and chastity, in small communities which, as Tanner observes, closely resemble the *béguinages* of the Low Countries and the Rhineland, though this term is never applied to them in the Norwich records.<sup>44</sup> They were, perhaps, the orthodox equivalents of the Lollard women – 'great reasoners in Scripture' – whose activities as readers and teachers within the household have been documented by Claire Cross.<sup>45</sup>

From the pattern of book-giving I have described it seems clear that the literary culture of nuns in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and that of devout gentlewomen not only overlapped but were more or less indistinguishable.<sup>46</sup> Chaucer's portrait of the Prioress, with her refined table manners and her French of Stratford-atte-Bow, seems to be an ironic and somewhat patronising representation of precisely this fact, viewed from the position of the well-travelled royal servant competent in three or four languages. Nunneries, more than male religious houses, recruited from the upper classes, and their inhabitants knew English and French, in the same way as their aristocratic counterparts remaining in the world.

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Both laywomen and nuns were of course excluded from higher education, but this does not mean they knew no Latin at all. Many women, both inside and outside nunneries, owned Latin psalters and books of hours and must have had some knowledge of that language. Moreover, the fact that the only woman in the later Middle Ages who is known to have translated a text from Latin into English and one of the very few laypeople known to have owned a Latin Bible is a widow, dame Eleanor Hull, means that Latin learning was not necessarily the preserve of religious and bears out my view that nuns and pious gentlewomen shared a literary culture.<sup>47</sup> The piety of Cecily, duchess of York, reveals to what extent this culture was oral: she heard works read, remembered them and passed them on to her companions. This is a textuality of the spoken as well as the written word; it begins in the book, which may have been read aloud by a clerk, but is then transmitted among the women by word of mouth. The Vernon manuscript, which is a huge book intended for public reading and display, is also part of a predominantly oral and memorialising culture.

So far I have been describing this culture from the outside, which is Chaucer's perspective also, though without his irony. We do, though, have in Julian of Norwich's *Revelation of Love* a surviving voice from within it and a subjectivity shaped by it. The consciousness and sensibility represented in her book are the product of the kinds of texts which are in the Vernon manuscript, and which the devout women whose books I have mentioned above continued to read throughout the fifteenth century. Julian is an almost exact contemporary of Chaucer, and must have been writing the extended version of her *Revelation of Love* in the late 1380s and early 90s, around the same date as the composition of the Prioress's Tale and the compilation of the Vernon manuscript.<sup>48</sup> Although we know that she had become an anchoress in Norwich by 1394 we do not know what her status was at the time she had her visions in 1373. It is often assumed that she must have been a nun, though this seems to be in order to claim a clerical education for her.<sup>49</sup> She may well have been a laywoman, perhaps a widow or a vowess like Joan Clopton, and became a recluse only at around fifty.<sup>50</sup> The question of whether or not Julian was a nun is in any case largely irrelevant if we acknowledge that nuns and devout gentlewomen were part of the same textual community.

Belonging to this textual community allows Julian to construct a self whose femininity is its strength. Unlike Margery Kempe, she occupies without strain a marginal cultural space, embracing its confines rather than struggling against them:

Botte god for bede that ȝe schulde saye or take it so that I am a techere, for I meene nouȝt soo, no I mente nevere so; for I am a womann, leued, febille and freylle.<sup>51</sup>

This is the space delimited for the anchoress by texts like Aelred's *De institutione inclusarum* and *Ancrene Wisse*. (In the *Life* of Christina of Markyate this space is made literal: it is the tiny room off the hermit Roger's cell, a span and a half wide, in which Christina was confined for over four years.)<sup>52</sup> Julian is bounded by the ways in which, as a woman, masculine clerical culture defines her: at the beginning of the Sloane text she presents herself as a 'simple creature that cowde no letter'<sup>53</sup> and the final colophon submits the book's readers to 'the holesom vnderstandyng and teching of the men that be of vertuuous life, sadde age and profound lernyng'.<sup>54</sup> This feminine cultural space is given official sanction by the ideology of virginity: it is inhabited above all by recluses, nuns, vowesses and chaste widows. Margery Kempe's vow of chastity is her badge of admission and serves, among other things, to confirm her in her own eyes as the kind of woman who belongs to the textual community created by 'Hyltons boke', 'Bridis boke', 'Stimulus amoris' and 'Incendium amoris'.<sup>55</sup>

The reader of Julian's text, female or male, is invited to share the feminised space, to become 'simple' like her, putting learning aside; there is no citation of authorities, or Latin quotation from the Bible.<sup>56</sup> Her visions may be profoundly intellectual but they are not presented as such. The sources they acknowledge are from religious lore rather than learning: in the short texts she refers, as I have said, to the legend of St Cecilia, which she heard in church,<sup>57</sup> and in the long to a story about the conversion of St Denis,<sup>58</sup> and another about the youthful sin of St John of Beverley of which no written version has survived.<sup>59</sup> Her visions seem to have their origin in vernacular texts and images formed by the traditions of Cistercian and Franciscan piety, of Aelred's *De institutione inclusarum* and, especially, of the many fourteenth-century English derivatives of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi*, which was originally written for a nun.<sup>60</sup> Not only are these texts vividly pictorial, but they draw on a vernacular discourse of religious sensibility – which is also the discourse of the Vernon manuscript's *A Talking of the Love of God* – whose great models of grief and compassion in the crucifixion drama are female: the Virgin and the other two Maries. Chaucer's representation of maternal grief in the Prioress's Tale locates it in the same tradition of piety. The object of this grief and compassion is the feminised suffering Christ, who provides the female visionary with a way of investing meekness with power: 'I it am that is heyest; I it am that is lowist; I it am that is all'.<sup>61</sup>

Julian's editors, Colledge and Walsh, disbelieve her account of herself as unlettered, and appropriate her book to a masculine clerical culture, analysing the rhythms of her prose in terms of Latin rhetoric. It seems just as plausible to follow Marion Glasscoe in arguing that Julian's prose

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rhythms are ‘often those of the speaking voice’, and are ‘quite consistent with an oral tradition’.<sup>62</sup> Glasscoe does not explore the nature of this tradition, and seems in fact to be referring to the actual process of composition, which she sees as pointing ‘to an author thinking aloud rather than polishing pre-formulated ideas’, that is, as dictating to an amanuensis. But the oral tradition that lies behind Julian’s prose must also be the tradition of the speech community to which she belonged, a community in which women heard and remembered English texts read aloud, in which they listened to English sermons, but above all in which they were accustomed, in Bunyan’s phrase, to ‘talking about the things of God’. Devout women’s talk, like women’s talk in general, is frequently represented in the rules for recluses as merely trivial gossip, to be avoided at all costs as an occasion of sin; Aelred of Rievaulx’s *De institutione inclusarum*, for example, opens with a caricature of the anchoress at her window, with

an olde womman fedyng hir with tales, or elles a new iangler and teller of tidynges of that monke, or of that clerke, or of widowes dissolucion, or of maidens wantownes, of the whiche arisith lawghyng, scornynge and vnclene thoughtes slepyng or wakyng, so that atte last the recluse is fulfilled with lust and likyng, bakbityng, sclaudre and hatrede and the tother with mete and drinke.<sup>63</sup>

This is a masculine clerical view, the creation of anti-feminist discourse. For devout women – indeed, for all women – talking together must often have been a source of strength.<sup>64</sup> Margery Kempe has left us testimony to the support that women derived from different kinds of conversation. She visited one of the hospitals in Lynn, where she ministered to two sick women ‘and telde him ful many good wordys and steryd hem to mekenes and pacyens’.<sup>65</sup> She cured a woman who, like Margery herself years before, had lost her wits after childbirth, praying for her and reassuring her of God’s love: ‘whyl [Margery] was wyth hir, sche was meke a-now and herd hir spekyn and dalyin [converse] wyth good wil’.<sup>66</sup> She tells us that the abbess of Denny ‘ofytymys sent for þe said creatur that sche xulde come to speke wyth hir and wyth hir sisterys’, despite the fact, as Hope Emily Allen points out, that the Poor Clares at Denny were strictly enclosed.<sup>67</sup> Margery frequently represents herself as offering other women counsel, but in her most famous conversation, with Julian of Norwich, whom she visited around 1413, she sought Julian’s advice about whether her visions were genuine ‘for the ankres was expert in swech thyngys and good counsel coud yeuyn’. The two women seem to have talked together over the course of several days: ‘Mych was þe holy dalyawns þat þe ankres and þis creatur haddyn be comownyng in [talking about] þe lofe of owyre Lord

Ihesu Crist many days þat þei were to-gedyr'.<sup>68</sup> Whatever Julian's view of Margery, it is clear that she did not share the attitude of Richard Caister, vicar of St Stephen's, Norwich, who, when Margery first asked to speak to him for an hour or two, exclaimed: 'Benedicite. What coud a women occupy an owyr et tweyn owyrs in þe lofe of owyr Lord?'<sup>69</sup> The rhetoric of Julian's own prose must have been influenced by the habits of speech developed in 'holy dalyawns' with her spiritual advisers and female friends. The latter presumably included the 'certayne personn' she loved and about whose spiritual progress she wanted assurance, and whom the short text reveals to have been a woman.<sup>70</sup> Norman Davis, discussing the language of the Pastons, has drawn attention to the often disregarded oral element in late-medieval English prose, including the prose of the women members of the family who were apparently unable to write:

It is abundantly clear that . . . even those who could not write were thoroughly articulate. Though we may hear the tones of the pulpit in some of Agnes's and Margaret's injunctions, for the most part the language is manifestly the speech of the time, only organized and sometimes heightened a little for the written page.<sup>71</sup>

Julian's text has the fluidity of talk, now brief, now expansive, moving in and out of autobiography. It is anchored in her own experience, beginning with her illness and returning to it towards the end of the book. The history of the text's genesis is also inscribed within it: what we have in the long version is not merely an expansion of the short one, but a work that has accreted over a period of years by the exercise of memory.<sup>72</sup> (Julian's own sense of its being still in process is revealed in the last chapter when she says: 'This booke is begunne be Gods gift and his grace, but it is not yet performid [completed], as to my syte').<sup>73</sup> Late on, in chapter 66, she records how after having received the first fifteen visions, which she has just described at length, her sickness and pain returned:

Than cam a religious person to me and askid me how I ferid. And I seyde I had ravid today, and he leuhte loud and inderly [heartily]. And I seyde: 'The cross that stod afor my face, methowte it blode fast.' And with this word the person that I spake to waxid al sad [became very solemn] and mervelid. And anon I was sor ashamid and astonyed for my recleshede [heedlessness] . . .<sup>74</sup>

The visions first occurred, as this passage makes clear, in a realm of experience outside discourse, which Julian herself designates as madness. It is because the 'religious person' takes her seriously when she tells him the crucifix appeared to bleed that she learns to re-evaluate what she has seen. That is, his response and the religious guilt it awakens in her stimulate the whole lengthy process whereby her non-rational experience is brought into the realm of language, textualised, meditated over and given meaning.



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The ‘religious person’ who sets the process in motion whereby a lived life is made into a text takes her seriously not only because, as Colledge and Walsh claim, ‘he knew her well and was prepared to give credence to what she might say’,<sup>75</sup> but presumably also because for him bleeding crucifixes are plausible and he half-expects holy women to have visions. The orthodox clerical culture to which he apparently belongs is, as the *mariales* reveal, a culture of the miraculous; he may well have owned a preaching handbook containing Latin miracles of the Virgin far stranger than what Julian says she has seen. His reading of her experience locates her in the visionary tradition established by such women as Elizabeth (? of Schönau), Mechtild of Hackeborn and Bridget of Sweden, and enables her to enter a textual community. Outside that community, she feels herself to be isolated and meaningless:

This was a gret synne . . . that I for foly, of feling a litill bodily payne, so onwisely lost for the time the comfort of all this blissid shewing of our lord God. *Here you may sene what I am of myselfe*; but herein wold our curtes lord not leve me.<sup>76</sup>

Of herself she is nothing, or rather, she is everything that masculine clerical culture tells women they are. Julian allows herself to be rescued from her own isolate femininity by ‘our curtes lord’, by God’s sociability, enabling her to become a member of a group which authorizes her to speak in the extraordinarily challenging way she does, to assume her voices of power. To see Julian as a solitary is to ignore a central feature of her self-representation, which is relational. Again and again, she explicitly denies her own singularity:

And that I say of me I sey in the person of al myn even cristen.<sup>77</sup>

for if I loke singularly to myselfe I am right nowte; but in general I am in hope, in onehede of charitie with all myn evyn cristen.<sup>78</sup>

And thy shewyng [of sin] I toke singularly to myselfe, but be al the gracious comferte that folowyth, as ye shal seen, I was leryd to take it to al my even cristen, al in general and nothing in special; thowe our lord shewid me that I should synne, by me alone is vnderstode al.<sup>79</sup>

It is as if the outward-turningness of the vowess, committed, as Joan Clopton was, to a life of charity towards her fellow-Christians, defines the boundaries of the self as fluid and relational: ‘by me alone is vnderstode al’.<sup>80</sup> Whereas Margery Kempe constantly negotiates herself into confrontations that reinforce her and our sense of her specificity, of an ego that defines itself through marking out the difference between the ‘creature’ and the external world, Julian’s strategy is to find meaning and power in dissolving those boundaries. She occupies a series of shifting subjectivities,

representing herself at times as the docile and uncomprehending child of the church and at others speaking with the voice of God.

Through these shifting subjectivities she is able to maintain two quite different views of what it means to be feminine. On the one hand she accepts, as I have said, the clerical definition of the unlettered woman as weak and marginal. Nevertheless at the same time she has an utter confidence in her own gender that presumably derives from her experience of women's collective lives, of being her mother's daughter,<sup>81</sup> and from the sense of intellectual and emotional relationship with other women that is revealed in the passing on of books or in the shared talk that men habitually ridicule. This confidence in her own gender manifests itself in her feminisation of God. She makes him maternal<sup>82</sup> and, more crucially for orthodox thinking, wholly loving and peaceable. For her, God is not wrathful. Anger in late-medieval aristocratic culture is part of the construction of masculinity: in Malory's *Morte Darthur*, for example, anger is a mainspring of chivalry; it is what drives knights to their greatest demonstrations of prowess.<sup>83</sup> Peaceableness, on the other hand, is a feminine attribute in which women were trained. In the fifteenth-century courtesy text, *The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*, the daughter is taught to answer her husband meekly and thus 'slake his mood', since 'A fair worde and a meeke / dooth wrappe slake'.<sup>84</sup> Christine de Pizan devotes a whole section of *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* to advising 'How the good and wise princess will make every effort to restore peace between the barons if there is any discord'.<sup>85</sup> For Julian, 'God is the goodnes that may not be wroth for he is not but goodnes';<sup>86</sup> 'I saw no manner of wreth in God, neyther for short tyme ne for longe, for sothly, as to my syte, if God myte be wroth a touch we shuld never have lif ne stede ne beyng'.<sup>87</sup> The God who is not angry is a God who is not judgemental; he does not condemn, but saves: 'our hevynly moder Iesus may not suffre us that arn his children to perishen; for he is almyty, all wisdom and al love; and so is non but he'.<sup>88</sup>

The straightforward meditative structure on which Aelred of Rievaulx's *De institutione inclusarum* is built – on a sequence of past, present and future – means that the climax of his text is a contemplation of death and judgement. The Vernon translator rises enthusiastically to the occasion:

Of þis day of dome, suster, I preye þe þat þu byholde þe horroure and þe drede . . . From aboue schal come þe jugge fers and wroþ; his wrappe schal brenne as eny fuyr, his chaar þat be terrible as eny tempest forto take veniaunce in gret ire, and to destruye his enemys in leytynge [incandescent] fuyr . . . A, suster, wat stench is ter þer, what horroure, what drede, what sorwe! . . . ȝif þey [the damned] lyfte vp here eȝen, the wrappe of here domesman is above here heed; ȝif þey lokeþ downward, þe orroure of þe put of helle is aȝens here face.<sup>89</sup>

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Julian’s complex and poetic parable of the lord and the servant, on which she meditated, she says, for nearly twenty years, is her answer to this hideous parody of masculinity. If she blurs the boundaries of the self, she also blurs the boundaries of gender: her God is both masculine and feminine, both high and low, both powerful and loving. Against the church’s teaching on the subject of damnation, to which she is nevertheless careful to make clear she submits, she places her own vision of the sovereign goodness of all things, speaking with the serenity that calmed even Margery Kempe: ‘That is impossible to the is not impossible to me’, she has God say: ‘I shal save my worde in al things and I shal make althing wele.’<sup>90</sup>

The short text of the *Revelation* survives in only one manuscript, known to have been owned by an early sixteenth-century Carthusian, James Grenehalgh;<sup>91</sup> the manuscripts – there were perhaps two of them – that lie behind the seventeenth-century versions of the long text have disappeared. We know nothing of their medieval history and no-one, so far as I know, mentions owning or reading copies of Julian’s book in the fifteenth century. It looks as if whoever preserved the long text was not concerned to disseminate it. The most obvious explanation for this is that, in the period of Lollard persecution which Anne Hudson has explored so fully,<sup>92</sup> it was simply too risky to circulate openly the revelations of a ‘symple woman who cowde no letter’ and yet who obviously knew the Bible well, who wrote for other unlearned people in the vernacular, claiming a privately mediated source of authority and presenting a reading of experience in some ways drastically at odds with that offered by official penitential religion.<sup>93</sup> Chaucer’s Parson, clearly strongly approved of in civil-service circles and often felt to be a bit of a Lollard himself, in fact provides a deeply conventional penitential tract. Chaucer’s simpering Prioress is satirised; sophisticated London readers are invited to regard her feminine piety as desperately limited, largely because it is feminine. And yet, of course, the meekness, littleness and simplicity which are central to that piety are key terms in Julian’s text. Even the prioress’s brooch with its suggestive motto, ‘Amor vincit omnia’, is a miniaturised and purely decorative version of the awesome claims Julian makes for the power of love:

I it am: the myte and the goodness of the faderhed. I it am: the wisdam of the moderhede. I it am: the lyte and the grace that is al blissid love. I it am: the Trinite. I it am: the unite. I am the sovereyne goodness of all manner of thyngs.<sup>94</sup>

The inwardness of the feminine sub-culture that Chaucer represents in the Prioress eludes him; even that greatest of ventriloquists cannot speak, as Julian does, with its ambivalent, paradoxical and compelling voices.

## NOTES

- 1 I should like to acknowledge my debt to conversations on this and related topics with various friends, especially Jeremy Goldberg, Carol Meale, Ann Hutchison, Rosalynn Voaden and Anne Dutton.
- 2 The most recent full account of the evidence on Chaucer's circle is in Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), chapters 2 and 3. See also Richard Firth Green, 'Women in Chaucer's Audience', *Chaucer Review* 18 (1983), 146-54.
- 3 Chris Given-Wilson, *The Royal Household and the King's Affinity: Service, Politics and Finance in England 1360-1413* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 60.
- 4 C. H. Talbot (ed.), *The Life of Christina of Markyate, A Twelfth Century Recluse*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959, 1987), p. 51.
- 5 Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (eds.), Isa Ragusa, (trans.), *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 2.
- 6 Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (eds.), *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, 2 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978), 1, pp. 204-5. The reference to St Cecilia is only in the short text.
- 7 See Mary S. Serjeantson (ed.), *Legendys of Hooly Wummen by Osbern Bokenham*, EETS OS 206 (1938), p. 202:

Now, blyssyd Cecyle, syth ye be  
 Lylve of heuene by chast clenness,  
 Weye to þe blynde by perfythnesse  
 Of good werkys, & wyth actyf lyf  
 Endewed wer [and] wyth contemplatif . . .

(lines 7432-6)

(I am indebted to Samantha Riches for pointing out the significance of this passage.) For the colophon, which reveals that British Library Arundel MS 327 was commissioned in Cambridge by Friar Thomas Burgh who 'yafe yt onto this holy place of nunnys', see p. 289.

- 8 See Carleton Brown, *Study of the Miracle of Our Lady Told by Chaucer's Prioress*, Chaucer Society Publications, 2nd series 45 (London: Kegan Paul Trench Trubner, 1910) and 'The Prioress's Tale', in W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (eds.), *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (Chicago: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1941), pp. 447-85; Margaret H. Statler, 'The Analogues of Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*: the Relation of Group c to Group a', *PMLA* 65 (1950), pp. 896-910.
- 9 E.g. Cambridge, Sidney Sussex College MS 95, a huge compilation of miracles of the Virgin containing two texts of the story of the Chorister Killed by Jews.
- 10 Friar William Herbert's preaching book (British Library Additional MS 46919 [olim Phillipps 8336]) and Cambridge, Trinity College MS 0.9.38, the commonplace book of a fifteenth-century Glastonbury monk, both contain Latin versions of the Chorister Killed by Jews. It also occurs in another compilation made for apparently similar purposes: British Library Additional

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MS 11579, an early fourteenth-century religious miscellany containing a large number of Latin exempla.

- 11 This is the view that A. I. Doyle took in his thesis, ‘A Survey of the Origins and Circulation of Theological Writings in English in the 14th, 15th, and early 16th Centuries’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, 2 vols., 1953), I, p. 63. He still regards this as plausible in his introduction to *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Eng. Poet.a.1* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987), pp. 14–15, though there he also considers the possibility that it was compiled in a male religious house. N. F. Blake, ‘The Vernon Manuscript: Contents and Organisation’, in Derek Pearsall (ed.), *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), pp. 45–59 (p. 58) offers arguments for a female readership, as does Carol Meale in her article in the same volume, cited in n. 15 below.
- 12 See ‘A disputison bi twene chi[l]d Ihesu and Maistres of the lawe of Iewes’, f. 301r, and ‘A disputisoun by twene a cristenemon and a Iew’, f. 301v.
- 13 For a discussion of the recipients of the three texts by Rolle, see S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson (ed.), *Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse*, EETS OS 293 (1988), pp. lii–liiii, lxvi–lxvii, lxxv, lxxix–lxxx.
- 14 Fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century religious women owners of surviving Hilton manuscripts listed in N. R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*, 2nd edn. (London: Royal Historical Society, 1964), are: Elizabeth Wylby, nun of Campsey (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 268); successively: Beatrice Shirley (a laywoman), dame Alys Braintwath, Elizabeth Rede and Johanna Newmarche, nuns of Dartford (British Library Harley MS 2254); successively: Betryce Chaumbre, Emma Wynter and Denyse Caston, nuns of Dartford (Downside Abbey MS 26542); dame Elizabeth Horwode, abbess of the Franciscan nunnery in London (British Library Harley MS 2397); ‘abbatissa et conventus S[haftesbury]’ (British Library Additional MS 11748 [erroneously listed under Sempringham]); Anne Colvyll (British Library Harley MS 993), Rose Pachet (Oxford, All Souls College MS 25), and dame Jhon Sewell (Philadelphia, Rosenbach Foundation, Inc. H491 [printed bk]), all nuns of Syon. (Information on owners of BL Harley MS 2254 has been supplemented from C. E. Wright, *Fontes Harleiani*, London: British Library, 1972, pp. 80, 251, 284 and 304–5.)
- 15 For Grosseteste, see n. 20 below. For the audience of Marian miracles, see Carol M. Meale, ‘The Miracles of Our Lady: Context and Interpretation’, in Pearsall (ed.), *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, 115–36, pp. 131–35. To her list of French collections of miracles owned by aristocratic ladies may be added the volume containing ‘le Vie des Sains, les Miracles Nostre Dame et plusieurs autres hystoires’ bought by Mahaut, countess of Artois in Paris in 1328. (See M. le Chanoine Dehaisnes, (ed.) *Documents et extraits divers concernant l’histoire de l’art dans la Flandre, l’Artois et le Hainaut avant le XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Part 1, Lille: L. Danel, 1886, p. 276. I am indebted to Roger Middleton for this reference.)
- 16 *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile*, p. 15.
- 17 Hope Emily Allen (ed.), *The English Writings of Richard Rolle, Hermit of Hampole* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), p. 103.

- 18 From 'The Office of St Richard Hermit', in Hope Emily Allen, *Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 56.
- 19 British Library, Cotton Cleopatra MS c.vi, which was given to Canonsleigh when Matilda de Clare refounded it as a women's house 'on or before her death in 1289'. (See E. J. Dobson, *The Origins of Ancrene Wisse*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, p. 294).
- 20 Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, McClean MS 123. See Ker, *Medieval Libraries*, pp. 140 and 287; M. R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the McClean Collection of Manuscripts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), pp. 262-9; N. J. Morgan, *A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles*, IV, *Early Gothic Manuscripts*, II, 1250-1285 (London: Harvey Miller, 1988), pp. 192-5. The manuscript originally contained Grosseteste's *Château d'Amour* (an English version of which is in the Vernon Manuscript), the Gospel of Nicodemus by 'Chrestien', Guillaume le Clerc's *Bestiary*, an illustrated French Apocalypse, the antiphons of the BVM and an exposition of the Paternoster from Edmund Rich's *Speculum ecclesie*.
- 21 *Testamenta Eboracensia*, ed. James Raine, I, Surtees Society 4 (1836), p. 202. The book is described as 'libro gallico de Duce Lancastriae'. Lady Roos was the daughter of the second wife of Henry, Lord Percy; his first wife had been the daughter of Henry, duke of Lancaster. The book may, of course, be one owned rather than written by him.
- 22 *Testamenta Eboracensia*, I, p. 271. This may have been *The Abbey of the Holy Ghost* (which is in the Vernon MS), or *The Twelve Fruits of the Holy Ghost*, which is addressed to a nun. For the latter, see P. S. Jolliffe, *A Check-List of Middle English Prose Writings of Spiritual Guidance* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1974), pp. 102 and 144.
- 23 *Testamenta Eboracensia*, I, p. 352. Texts of *The Ghost of Guy* (*Spiritus Guidonis*) and *Barlaam and Josaphat* (in Smaller Vernon Legend Collection) are in the Vernon Manuscript.
- 24 An English version of this text is in the Vernon Manuscript. See Thorlac Turville-Petre, 'The Vernon and Clopton Manuscripts', in Pearsall (ed.), *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, pp. 29-59. For Matilda Bowes's will, see James Raine (ed.), *Wills and Inventories . . . of the Northern Counties of England*, Surtees Society 2 (1834), p. 65.
- 25 For Alienora Roos's will see Jonathan Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1988), pp. 106 and 292. For the identification of 'Maulde buke', see Theresa R. Halligan (ed.), *The Booke of Gostlye Grace of Mechtilde of Hackeborn* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1979), p. 32.
- 26 J. W. Clay (ed.), *North Country Wills . . . 1383-1558*, Surtees Society 116 (1908), pp. 48-9. *The Chastising of God's Children* was written in the late fourteenth century for a nun or a community of women religious; see *The Chastising of God's Children*, ed. Joyce Bazire and Eric Colledge (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957), pp. 41ff.
- 27 This manuscript is listed by Ker, *Medieval Libraries*, p. 123 and p. 279, as untraced after being sold at Sotheby's in 1932.

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- 28 Beeleigh Abbey, Miss C. Foyle; see Ker, *Medieval Libraries*, pp. 6 and 228.
- 29 Norman P. Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370–1532* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984), p. 112. Trinity College Cambridge MS B.14.15, which contains *The Doctrine of the Herte* (addressed to a ‘religious sister’), was owned by dame Christine Seint Nicholas of the London Franciscans, on whose death in 1455/6 it passed to the nunnery. See Ker, *Medieval Libraries*, p. 279 and Jolliffe, *Checklist*, p. 91.
- 30 British Library Harley MS 2409, See Ker, *Medieval Libraries*, pp. 140 and 287. See Margaret Connolly, ‘An Edition of the Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 1990), p. 18.
- 31 See P. J. Croft, *Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond, Elizabeth of York and Wynkyn de Worde* (London: Quaritch, 1958).
- 32 See Colin Richmond, *John Hopton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 125 and 131. Thomasin Hopton also left her son, Nicholas Sidney, two service books and a copy of Hoccleve.
- 33 Downside Abbey MS 26542. See N. R. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), II, p. 455; Ker, *Medieval Libraries*, pp. 57 and 251; Colledge and Walsh, *A Book of Showings*, I, p. 2.
- 34 The manuscript also bears the name of another female owner, Alicia Scheynton, (‘et post ea[m] conventu’) in a fifteenth-century hand on f. 1.
- 35 Colin Richmond drew attention in his *John Hopton* (pp. 122–3) to the number of Thomasins among Thomasin Hopton’s legatees. He now believes that many of them were god-daughters (private communication). Matilda Bowes left bequests to four other god-daughters called Matilda, besides Matilda Hilton.
- 36 RSTC 14042, sig. a4v.
- 37 See Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries c. 1275 r. 1535* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), pp. 317–22.
- 38 Roberta L. Gilchrist, ‘The Archaeology of Female Piety: Gender, Ideology and Material Culture in Later Medieval England’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 1990), p. 92. Gilchrist cites evidence from Elstow and especially from Godstow, where the traditional cloister was replaced by three household buildings. She points out that the parallel tendency in monasteries was towards fragmentation into individual, rather than group, spaces.
- 39 Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages; Social Change in England c. 1200–1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 50. Dyer makes the point, though, that even ‘inner’ households were ‘predominantly masculine societies, because with the exception of a few female companions for the lady, and a washerwoman, the officers and servants were always male’. He does not mention the domestic arrangements made for young children, which must have entailed female servants other than a washerwoman.
- 40 For Lady Margaret Beaufort’s household routine, see the account given by Bishop John Fisher in the sermon he preached at a memorial service after her death, in J. E. B. Mayor (ed.), *The English Works of John Fisher*, EETS ES 27 (1876), pp. 294–5. Fisher reports that ‘As for medytacyon she had dyuers bokes in Frensshe wherwith she wolde occupy herselfe when she was wery of prayer.

- Wherefore dyuers she dyde translate oute of Frensshe into Englysshe' (p. 295).
- 41 Most of the these books are mentioned in the duchess of York's will, proved in 1495. She left to her granddaughter Brigitte (daughter of Edward IV) the *Golden Legend*, the life of Catherine of Siena, and her 'boke of Saint Matilde' (Mechtild of Hackeborn). To another granddaughter, Anne de la Pole, prioress of Syon Abbey, she left a book containing 'Bonaventura' and Hilton, and 'a boke of the Revelacions of Saint Burgitte'. See J. G. Nichols and J. Bruce (eds.), *Wills from Doctors' Commons*, Camden Society original series 83 (1863), pp. 1-8, pp. 2-3, and H. R. Plomer, 'Books Mentioned in Wills', *Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 7 (1904), 99-121.
  - 42 See 'Ordinances and Rules of the Princess Cecill', in *A Collection of Ordinances and Regulations for the Government of the Royal Household Made in Divers Reigns from King Edward III to King William and Queen Mary* (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1790), 37-9, p. 37, and C. A. J. Armstrong, 'The Piety of Cicely, Duchess of York', in Douglas Woodruff (ed.), *For Hilaire Belloc. Essays in Honour of his 72nd Birthday* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1942), 73-94.
  - 43 I am grateful to Thorlac Turville-Petre for providing me with his transcription of the Latin and this translation, which is by Geoffrey Yeo. Joan (née Besford) and her husband Sir William Clopton were owners of a manuscript, now in three parts, containing Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne*, *Meditations on the Supper of Our Lord*, Mandeville's *Travels*, *Piers Plowman*, *La Estorie del Evangelie*, and *The Assumption of Our Lady*; see Thorlac Turville-Petre, 'The Relation of the Vernon and Clopton Manuscripts', in Pearsall (ed.), *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, pp. 29-44. Discussing a group of three shields in the manuscript which depict (a) the arms of Clopton impaled with those of Besford (i.e. Joan Clopton's arms) and (b) those of Joan Clopton's sister's and (c) mother-in-law's husbands, Turville-Petre argues that these point to 'three wealthy and pious gentry families . . . all much involved in local administration . . . all longstanding retainers of the Earls of Warwick' (p. 38). If we are to see the shields as representing the interconnectedness of three families, we might wish to focus on the female relationships - between two sisters and the mother-in-law of one of them - that underpin that interconnectedness. These women were not involved in local administration, nor were they retainers of the earls of Warwick; it may have been they who read the book while their husbands were running the county.
  - 44 See Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich, 1370-1532*, pp. 64-5.
  - 45 See Claire Cross, '"Great Reasoners in Scripture": the Activities of Women Lollards', in Derek Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women Studies in Church History: Subsidia 1* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), pp. 359-80.
  - 46 This is less true of men, simply because many more male clerics received some form of specialised higher education in Latin than their aristocratic lay counterparts. A useful contrast between the reading habits of a layman and an ecclesiastic is afforded by the fourteenth-century libraries of Sir Simon Burley and William de Walcote, clerk, discussed by V. J. Scattergood, 'Two Medieval Book Lists', *The Library*, 5th series 23 (1968), 236-9.
  - 47 See Alexandra Barratt, 'Dame Eleanor Hull: a Fifteenth-Century Translator', in



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- Roger Ellis *et al.* (eds.), *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), pp. 87–101.
- 48 The short version is commonly said to have been written shortly after Julian had her visions in May 1373; see, for example, B. A. Windeatt, ‘Julian of Norwich and her Audience’, *Review of English Studies* new series 28 (1977), 1–17, p. 17. There is no firm evidence for the dating, however. Internal evidence in the long version suggests that Julian was working on it from as early as 1388 at least. The prologue must have been composed before the allegory of the lord and the servant was added to the fourteenth vision in 1393. The chapter headings in the Sloane manuscript, which are not in the Paris version, presumably represent a further stage of the editorial process. (For manuscripts, see n. 53).
  - 49 For arguments that Julian ‘received an exceptionally good grounding in Latin, in Scripture and the liberal arts, and that thereafter she was able and permitted to read widely in Latin and vernacular spiritual classics’, see Colledge and Walsh, *A Book of Showings*, 1, pp. 44–5. I am not convinced that Julian’s Latin learning was necessarily as extensive as Colledge and Walsh claim.
  - 50 Sister Benedicta Ward argues that ‘Julian may well have been a young widow and also have been a mother before she became an anchoress’. See her ‘Julian the Solitary’, in Kenneth Leech and Sr Benedicta SLG (eds.), *Julian Reconsidered* (Oxford: Fairacres Press, 1988), 11–35, p. 17. If she became an anchoress at around fifty, perhaps it is not too far-fetched to see this as a reconfirmation of her life after the menopause. (For age at menopause in the Middle Ages, see Vern Bullough and Cameron Campbell, ‘Female Longevity and Diet in the Middle Ages’, *Speculum* 55, 1980, 317–325). Little has been published on vowesses; I am indebted to Patricia Cullum for allowing me to read her paper on ‘Vowesses and Veiled Widows’ which was presented at a conference on ‘Medieval Women: Work, Spirituality, Literacy and Patronage’ held at the University of York in September, 1990. Vowesses were often, but not always, widows; they took a vow of chastity before a bishop and wore the veil, mantle and ring that betokened their status but, according to Callum, ‘were not required to give up their property . . . [or] to live in seclusion’.
  - 51 Colledge and Walsh, *A Book of Showings*, 1, p. 222. This passage is not in the extended text.
  - 52 ‘In this prison, therefore, Roger placed his happy companion. In front of the door he rolled a heavy log, the weight of which was actually so great that it could not be put in its place or taken away by the recluse. And so, thus confined, the handmaid of Christ sat on a hard stone until Roger’s death . . .’; see *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, p. 103.
  - 53 Marion Glasscoe (ed.), *Julian of Norwich, A Revelation of Love*, (Exeter, 1986), p. 2. Glasscoe’s edition of the long version is from British Library Sloane MS 2499, while Colledge and Walsh’s is from Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Fonds anglais MS 40. Both manuscripts were written in the seventeenth century. I prefer the Sloane text because, although careless, its language has been less frequently modernised than that in the Paris manuscript. All my quotations from the long version are from Glasscoe’s edition, unless otherwise stated;

quotations from the short version (from British Library Additional MS 33790) are from Colledge and Walsh's edition.

The expression 'connen lettre(s)' means 'to be able to read and write, be learned, be educated' (see *MED lettre* n. 5), so when Julian says she 'cowde no lettre' she does not necessarily mean that she was illiterate, like Margery Kempe. Given that reading and writing were separate skills, Julian may have been able to read English but not write it; Marion Glasscoe postulates that she dictated her text to a scribe. The Paris manuscript reads 'vnlettyrde', which Colledge and Walsh interpret as meaning that Julian was not educated in Latin (at the time she had her visions).

54 Glasscoe, *Revelation*, p. 103.

55 S. B. Meech and H. E. Allen (eds.), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, EETS OS 212 (1940), p. 39.

56 It is generally agreed that Julian knew the Bible well, but her allusions to it, unlike Langland's for example, are all incorporated into her own prose. Julian explicitly directs her writings not 'to hem that be wise, for thei wote it wele', but 'to yow that be simple' (Ch. 9, Rev. 1; Glasscoe, *Revelation*, p. 10). In this she is uncharacteristic of the mainstream of Continental visionary spirituality in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. André Vauchez points out that Julian's contemporaries, including Dorothea of Montau and Bridget of Sweden, 'ne se désintéressent pas du salut du peuple, mais elles s'adressent exclusivement aux chefs politiques et religieux; rois, papes, à la rigueur évêques et supérieurs d'ordre. Les foules avec lesquelles elles n'avaient guère de contacts, ne leur inspiraient que défiance': see André Vauchez, *La Sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du moyen âge* (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 1981), p. 477.

57 Colledge and Walsh, *A Book of Showings*, I, p. 201.

58 Chapter 18, *Revelation* 8; Glasscoe, *Revelation*, p. 21. Colledge and Walsh point out that the ultimate source is Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*, but that vernacular versions of the legend were available at the end of the fourteenth century. (See Colledge and Walsh, *A Book of Showings*, II, p. 368).

59 Chapter 38, Rev. 13; Glasscoe, *Revelation*, p. 39.

60 These include *The Meditations on the Supper of Our Lord and the Hours of the Passion*, attributed to Robert Manning (ed. J. M. Cowper, EETS OS 60, 1865); the Middle English *Meditationes passionis Christi* (the current state of the edition by Jason Reakes which has been in progress for some years is unknown); *The Privy of the Passion* and a separate partially overlapping translation in Michigan State College MS 1 (entitled 'The Lyrical Meditations' by Stephanie M. Day in her 'Critical Edition of "The Privy of the Passion" and "The Lyrical Meditations"', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of York, 1991); the *Liber aureus* (no modern edition); and an independent translation of the *Meditationes passionis Christi* in Cambridge, Magdalene College Pepys MS 2125 (no modern edition). Stephanie Day, from whose thesis much of this information is drawn, shows that manuscripts of these texts circulated widely. See also Elizabeth Salter, 'The Manuscripts of Nicholas Love's *Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ* and Related Texts', in A. S. G. Edwards and Derek

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Pearsall (eds.), *Middle English Prose: Essays on Bibliographical Problems* (New York and London: Garland, 1981), pp. 115–27. Nicholas Love’s translation of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, the *Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ*, was made between 1408 and 1410, after Julian wrote the long text of *A Revelation of Love*.

- 61 Chapter 72; Glasscoe, *Revelation*, p. 88.
- 62 See Glasscoe, *Revelation*, pp. xv–xvi.
- 63 From the ME translation in Oxford, Bodleian Library Bodley MS 423; this section is not in the Vernon text. See John Ayto and Alexandra Barratt (eds.), *Aelred of Rievaulx’s De institutione inclusarum*, EETS OS 287 (1984), p. 1.
- 64 Deborah Jones defines gossip ‘as a way of talking between women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting, a female cultural event which springs from and perpetuates the restrictions of the female role, but also gives comfort and validation: see her ‘Gossip: Notes on Women’s Oral Culture’, in Deborah Cameron (ed.), *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1990), 242–50, p. 243, reprinted from *Women’s Studies International Quarterly* 3 (1980), 193–8. Jones argues that ‘The wider theme of gossip is always personal experience’ (p. 245). In *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (from §37 of which I take the quotation in my title) Bunyan describes seeing a group of ‘three or four poor women sitting at a door in the sun’ in a Bedford street, talking together (or in Jones’s terms, gossiping) ‘about the things of God’ which were part of their personal experience, as they were for Julian and Margery Kempe. Unlike many male eavesdroppers, real and fictional, Bunyan does not denigrate their talk but is, on the contrary, humbled by it, and it is the beginning of his conversion.
- 65 Meech and Allen, *Margery Kempe*, p. 177.
- 66 *Ibid.*, p. 178.
- 67 *Ibid.*, pp. 202 and 337. Eileen Power shows that aristocratic visitors were granted papal indulgences to enter nunneries, even of enclosed orders.
- 68 *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- 69 *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- 70 Colledge and Walsh, *A Book of Showings*, 1, p. 252.
- 71 Norman Davis, *The Language of the Pastors*, Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 40 (1954), 119–144, p. 137.
- 72 Mary Carruthers’s argument about the relation between texts, memory and selfhood in the Middle Ages is apposite to Julian’s self-textualisation: ‘A modern woman would be very uncomfortable to think she was facing the world with a “self” constructed out of bits and pieces of great authors of the past, yet I think in large part that is exactly what a medieval “self” or character was . . . It does underscore the profound degree to which memory was considered to be the prerequisite for character itself . . . Instead of the word “self” or even “individual” we might better speak of a “subject-who-remembers”, and in remembering also feels and thinks and judges.’ See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 180 and 182.
- 73 Chapter 86; Glasscoe, *Revelation*, p. 102.

- 74 Chapter 66, Rev. 16; Glasscoe, *Revelation*, p. 81.
- 75 Colledge and Walsh, *A Book of Showings*, I, p. 168.
- 76 Chapter 66; Glasscoe, *Revelation*, p. 81. My emphasis.
- 77 Chapter 8, Rev. 1; *ibid.*, p. 10.
- 78 Chapter 9, Rev. 2; *ibid.*
- 79 Chapter 37, Rev. 13; *ibid.*, p. 38.
- 80 Nancy Chodorow's trans-cultural account of feminine personality seems apposite here. She argues that 'a quality of embeddedness in social interaction and personal relationships characterizes women's life relative to men's' and that 'the care and socialization of girls by women ensures the production of feminine personalities founded on relation and connection, with flexible rather than rigid ego boundaries, and with a comparatively secure sense of gender identity'. See Nancy Chodorow, 'Family Structure and Feminine Personality', in Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (eds.), *Women, Culture and Society* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1979), 43-87, pp. 57, 59. Susan Stanford Friedman argues persuasively for the relevance of Chodorow's theories to the study of women's autobiographical writings in 'Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice', in Shari Benstock (ed.), *The Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 34-62.
- 81 That Julian's mother was at her bedside during her illness is revealed in the short text; she closed her daughter's eyes, believing her to be dead (Colledge and Walsh, *A Book of Showings*, I, p. 234).
- 82 For the theme of Jesus as mother, especially in Cistercian tradition, see 'Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing', in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother, Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 110-69.
- 83 See the discussion of anger in *The Book of Sir Tristram* in my *Sir Thomas Malory* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), pp. 100ff.
- 84 See F. J. Furnivall (ed.), *The Babeys Book*, EETS OS 32 (1868), p. 38.
- 85 Sarah Lawson (trans.), Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 50. Colin Richmond has supplied me with a good example of women as peacemakers; this is the occasion in the early 1480s when Margery Paston proposed to her husband John III that she, her mother (dame Elizabeth Brews), her mother-in-law (Margaret Paston) and dame Elizabeth Calthorp (an old friend of Margaret's) should jointly approach the dowager duchess of Norfolk and ask her to intercede on John's behalf to settle a family dispute over land. Margery's cousin had told her 'that on word of a woman shuld do more than the wordys of xx men'. The trio of elderly women that Margery assembled must have been formidable. See Norman Davis (ed.), *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, 1976), I, pp. 664-6.
- 86 Chapter 46; Glasscoe, *Revelation*, p. 49.
- 87 Chapter 49; *ibid.*, p. 52.
- 88 Chapter 61; *ibid.*, p. 75.
- 89 Ayto and Barratt (eds.), *De institutione inclusarum*, p. 57.

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- 90 Chapter 32, Rev. 13; Glasscoe, *Revelation*, p. 34.
- 91 Colledge and Walsh, *A Book of Showings*, 1, p. 3. Grenehalgh professed as a Carthusian in 1495.
- 92 See her *The Premature Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), esp. chapter 9, ‘The Context of Vernacular Wyclifism’.
- 93 Philippa Heley has reminded me that at her enclosure as a recluse Julian would have also been examined on behalf of her bishop to see whether she was ‘of laudable life and honest conversation’, and her views at that date cannot have been regarded as heterodox. (See Francis D. S. Darwin, *The English Medieval Recluse*, London: SPCK, 1944, p. 49.) The manuscript evidence, or lack of it, tells us about Julian’s fifteenth-century, not fourteenth-century, reception, though. Hudson has shown that the polarisation between orthodox and Wyclifite ideas developed gradually, and that it was not until the early fifteenth century that ‘the full measure of Wyclif’s heresy’ and ‘its tendency to encourage lay disobedience’ became clear, and the ecclesiastical machinery was set in motion to ‘isolate those who had any sympathy with any part of that heresy from the rest of society’. (See *The Premature Reformation*, pp. 393–4). It is in this climate of opinion that the *Revelations* may have appeared dangerous.
- 94 Chapter 59; Glasscoe, *Revelation*, p. 72.

‘. . . alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englisch,  
and frensch’: laywomen and their books in late  
medieval England<sup>1</sup>

CAROL M. MEALE

From 1462 until her death in 1478 Margaret, Lady Hungerford and Botreaux, chose a striking image through which to denote her authority. On her seal a woman kneels, surrounded by flowers and foliage. To her right a lion rampant holds a standard bearing the arms of her late husband, while to her left a griffin displays those of her father. A now indistinct scroll encircling the kneeling figure seems to have borne Margaret’s motto, ‘Myne trouth assured’; and her head is bowed, as she looks down at the pages of a book open upon her lap (see plate 1).<sup>2</sup> As an image it is richly suggestive, if ambiguous. What is it intended to convey to those who encountered it as a public statement? What is the attitude of the woman towards the book – reverential, or proprietorial? What kind of text is it meant to contain, and in what language?

The posture of the woman recalls contemporary Continental representations of the Virgin of Humility, in which Mary sits or kneels in a garden, surrounded by flowers symbolising her various attributes.<sup>3</sup> The presence of the book is reminiscent of Annunciation scenes in which the Virgin is shown at her devotions, although by the fifteenth century other female saints, such as Mary Magdalene and Barbara, could be depicted in similar positions of humility, again holding, or reading, an open book.<sup>4</sup> Is the image of the woman on Margaret Hungerford’s seal intended, then, to recall this iconography of female piety? Margaret is known to have been pious, and to have held a special devotion to the Virgin: indeed, the only books which may at present be associated with her are a *Lives of the Saints* in French, left to her by her father-in-law; and the legacies she mentions in her will: two ‘faire new’ mass books, both ‘wele corrected’; an antiphoner; a ‘hole legend’; an ‘Ordynall of Salisbury use’ and two ‘Processionels of the



PLATE 1. The seal of Margaret, Lady Hungerford and Botreaux (d. 1478)

same use'; a 'matyns boke'; and a copy of the service book used by the Brigettine nuns of Syon (at which nunnery she requested that her heart be buried.)<sup>5</sup> But while she may have been conspicuous during her lifetime for her piety Margaret was, at the same time, as sole heiress of William, Lord Botreaux (d. 1462), and widow of Robert, Lord Hungerford (d. 1459), in a position of power and responsibility – the more so, given that she was left to try to maintain her family's fortunes during the period of Yorkist ascendancy, when both her son and eldest grandson were executed for their Lancastrian sympathies.<sup>6</sup> Is the symbolism of the seal therefore more complex than it at first appears, perhaps designed as a pious gloss on the public assertiveness of Margaret's political role? Whatever the motives

dictating her choice – and it is an unusual one, for which no parallel survives in England<sup>7</sup> – the image provides an apt opening to this essay, for it serves to focus questions about the relationship between laywomen and books in the late Middle Ages, from the choices they made as to the books they owned (or read) to the nature of the evidence which survives to inform us of these choices.

As proves to be the case with Margaret Hungerford, one of the most important sources of information regarding female book-ownership is the will (or, more accurately, the testament).<sup>8</sup> Interpretation of the evidence provided by the will is not, however, straightforward: the nature of the document, and the solemnity and formality which characterises it, undoubtedly had some influence on the kind of books which were specified by a testator, in terms of both their content and their value. In the circumstances it is scarcely surprising that religious books, and in particular those associated directly with acts of worship, predominate amongst bequests made by both women and men. One explanation for this predominance may be the more lavish scale of production of service books, particularly when compared with copies of vernacular texts; in other words motives of piety and materialism may have combined to single out books of hours, missals and the like for special mention. Lady Margaret la Zouche's gift in 1449 of her 'best Primer' to her granddaughter, Elizabeth Chaworth, for instance, comes at the head of a long list of precious, and no doubt treasured, items: in addition to Margaret's service book Elizabeth was to receive 'a Franssh boke, a devise of gold, a girdill of purpull silk harnest with golde, a borde cloth, ij draght twoels of a suet of Parissch werke, my best peir shetys, a cofur of evere bounden with selver and ouer gilt, and a fair sprews cofur'.<sup>9</sup>

Aside from their inherent value as bequests, religious books were also, of course, peculiarly suited to serving a commemorative function. Anne Harling, whose third and last marriage was to John Lord Scrope of Bolton, and whose will is dated August 1498, left several books, but to her god-daughter, Anne Fitzwater, she bequeathed 'a Premier clasped with silver & gylte, for a remembraunce, to pray for me'.<sup>10</sup> Inscriptions in extant manuscripts can also make the function of commemoration explicit, as in New York Public Library Spencer MS 19, an illustrated copy of the English translation of Deguileville's *Pilgrimage of the Soul*, where the presentation of the book to the Yorkshire nunnery of Marrick 'By dame agnes Radcliff on / whose sowl Ihesu haue mercye Amen' is recorded (f. 3v). At other times the hope of remembrance may only be inferred, but I would cite here the will of Elizabeth Lady Fitzhugh, made in 1427, in which she left to her son Robert 'a sauter covered with red velwet' and to her daughters 'Mariory a primer



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covered in Rede . . . Darcy a sauter couered in blew, and . . . Malde Eure a primer couered in bleu'; and to her god-daughter, 'a book couered in grene with praiers therinne'.<sup>11</sup> It is surely fitting that these are all service books, which would have received regular use, and which would have provided occasion to remember their giver.

It would be perverse to regard bequests of these and similar books as anything other than an expression of genuine piety. But at the same time it must be acknowledged that while such bequests may give an accurate indication of one aspect of a testator's life, they do not necessarily give a complete account of the books they owned, or of their literary interests. It is now widely accepted that individuals did not always itemise all the books which they owned in their will, and in this connection the testament of a woman like dame Katherine Hawte, drawn up in 1493, gives pause for thought. Related through her final marriage to a leading family of Kentish gentry, whose members included several known book-owners and at least one musician,<sup>12</sup> there are tantalising indications in her will of her own cultural interests. By her three husbands Katherine had eight children, the youngest of whom cannot have been more than five or six years old at the time of her death. One of her first concerns at the end of her life was for the education of those of her children who were still of an age to attend school: she stipulated that all her purchased lands in 'ffyshyde morton Eston and Blacke watyr *and* in Peckham that my husband sir Richard hawte bought in kent and also my *parte* of the house in saynt / pancrasse *parissh* be sides fox lane and this house in Aldermanbury in london be solde and *with* the money / therof my children to be fownde and kepte to scole'. (Whether or not she included her youngest daughter, Besse, in this provision – the two eldest being married by this date – is, regrettably, unclear.) And she left some few books: to her two eldest daughters a 'masse booke' and her 'best prymer clapsed (*sic*) *with* syluer and gylt'; to her youngest daughter her 'secunde prymer'; and to her eldest son 'a lytell primer clapsed / *with* siluer'. It would seem highly likely both from the contents of Katherine Hawte's will and from what may be reconstructed of her life that her interests extended beyond an engagement with the practical texts of religious devotion.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps she simply considered it inappropriate to mention them in this context; a sense of decorum could well account for the preponderance of religious over secular books amongst wills in general, not simply in Katherine Hawte's.

There are other respects, too, in which it has to be recognised that wills cannot give a balanced view of the nature and probable extent of the female book-owning population. Not only do they offer incomplete chronological and geographical coverage – that is, they have different survival rates from

different periods and from different parts of the country<sup>14</sup> – but also they are limited as to the marital status and class of the women represented. The majority of extant wills were made by widows, by independent women. The explanation for this is that, as Caroline Barron has reminded us, the legal establishment in general deemed a woman's goods to belong to her father, if she were unmarried, or to her husband, while he lived.<sup>15</sup> Exceptions could be made, and a wife's testament made with permission of her husband could, towards the end of the period, be considered valid. But arrangements like that made by Thomasin Hopton, when she married for the third time in 1457, were far from usual: amongst the terms which she and John Hopton agreed before their marriage was that she should have control of her moveable property.<sup>16</sup> Where the issue of class is concerned, most of the wills I have found useful for this study were made by wealthy women, drawn from the upper levels of the gentry and from the nobility. Evidence for the ownership of books amongst women from the urban middle classes is, in my experience, less easily found, although bequests of devotional books by merchants' widows are occasionally recorded, for example, from London.<sup>17</sup> The wills of Beatrice Milreth who died in 1448, widow of a wealthy citizen, mercer, sheriff and alderman of London, and sometime MP, and Joan Buckland (or Bokeland), widow of Richard Buckland esquire, are unusually full and in many ways intriguing, but they offer rare glimpses into the interest in books of women of this class, and in both cases wealth was probably the determining factor with regard to their book-ownership.<sup>18</sup>

Beatrice Milreth left the service books belonging to her chapel to one of her sons by her first marriage, and a one-volume primer and psalter to her son-in-law, Henry Bardolph; but it was to her sister, Agnes Burgh, that she left the most substantial part of her collection, namely a book of 'merce and gramerce' with illuminated lettering, a roll of Christ's Passion, a copy of the gospel of Nichodemus in French, another book of unspecified contents in Latin and French, a French primer, and a roll of the fifteen Joys of the Virgin. Joan Buckland's bequest of twenty pounds to the 'poer men of flyshmonger Craffte in london' emphasises her affinity with the trade to which both her father and husband had belonged – although her husband had diversified his career interests to the extent that he was also a merchant of the Calais Staple, Treasurer and Victualler of Calais under Henry VI, and councillor to John, duke of Bedford. (He was one of Bedford's executors.) At the time of her death in 1462 Joan was living at her manor of Edgcote in Oxfordshire, and it was to the church of Our Lady here that she left four service books – a missal, a gradual, a breviary, and a processional, each carefully identified by the first words of the second leaf. To Richard Clarell,

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a young merchant of the Staple who appears to have been close to both Richard and Joan and who, in accordance with Joan's wishes, acquired Edgcote after her death, she left her 'litell Sawter' and 'j. Missall, with Syluer claspes'. There is nothing exceptional in these legacies of books (though the will as a whole strongly suggests that Joan was pious);<sup>19</sup> but in addition a small amount of money was left 'to my Skryvener at london'. Now was this scrivener employed solely in serving Joan's extensive business interests, or could he have undertaken other commissions for her?

Joan Buckland was clearly a woman of some wealth, who was in a position to buy, or commission, books as she chose. But she was also evidently capable in her handling of business affairs, which suggests that she had attained a certain level of education and literacy.<sup>20</sup> The larger question of what we mean by literacy today, and what the term meant in the Middle Ages, is one that is central to several of the essays in this volume,<sup>21</sup> and it is one that has particular point if we are seeking to understand women's access to books, and looking to sources other than the will – such as inscriptions in surviving manuscripts – for evidence of their use of them. It is, for example, quite possible that women who were unable to read or write possessed books: Margery Kempe tells us that she was holding an open service book when she was slightly injured by falling masonry in her local church.<sup>22</sup> But Margery would not have been able to write an inscription of ownership in her book, and so there would be no external proof of her possession of it – unless, that is, someone else wrote in it on her behalf. That Margery was not necessarily unusual in owning a book amongst women who would, in modern terminology, be described as illiterate is further suggested by a will from York. The bequest in 1432 of an English book 'de Fabulis et Narracionibus', together with household goods and a 'tabula' depicting the coronation of the Virgin, made to his servant of many years' standing, Agnes de Celayne, by a priest of St Martin's, Aldwark, is curious. Perhaps Agnes could read; but, equally, perhaps, she would have been able to have the book read to her.<sup>23</sup> In an age when 'reading' could be a communal activity, whether in aristocratic circles such as those of Cecily Neville and Margaret Beaufort or in artisan households such as those of the female Lollards in Norwich, the term 'reader' may need radical redefinition if we are to understand women's use of books.<sup>24</sup>

There is, nevertheless, no doubt that some women could, and did, receive training in both reading and writing, and women from the middle as well as the upper classes benefited from the acquisition of these skills, both personally and professionally.<sup>25</sup> But the question of their exact distribution – and their use – amongst women from different social

groupings remains open. A series of inscriptions in a late-fifteenth-century copy of Lydgate's *Troy Book*, Oxford, Bodleian Library Rawlinson MS poet.144,<sup>26</sup> illustrates some of the confusion which can arise from our present lack of knowledge. On the first page of this manuscript, in a neat, current hand appears the note 'thys boke heys meyn my lady / elsyzabethe peche – (A) whom god preserue Amen'; while on f. 6r, in a different, and ill-formed, hand the name 'Elysabethe peche' occurs by itself. This woman, of Lullingstone in Kent, can be identified as the wife of Sir John Peche, a Lord Deputy of Calais, who died in 1522. Members of the Peche family were earlier connected with the London mercantile companies of fishmongers, drapers and grocers, though John's father, Sir William Peche (d. 1488) was MP for Kent in 1450, and rose to the position of King's Carver to Edward IV and Richard III.<sup>27</sup> The status of the inscriptions relating to Elizabeth Peche within this manuscript, however, is far from clear. That on f. 6r, written in an untidy and seemingly unpractised hand, resembles many of the signatures of women which are extant from this period, and the contrast with the hand of the first inscription is marked.<sup>28</sup> Could it be that Elizabeth Peche had an *ex libris* written out for her, perhaps by someone in her employ, such as a clerk, and added her own signature later in the book? Such an explanation would certainly account for the peculiar phrasing of the note on f. 1r. But even if this is a plausible explanation of the inscriptions in the Rawlinson manuscript, it has to be remembered that not all women had recourse to trained scribes; and some women may have been reluctant to exercise their ability to write – even if they possessed it. So, again, although inscriptions in manuscripts offer an additional and invaluable source of information as to women's ownership of books, which complements that provided by wills, its use is far from unproblematic.

Ownership of books, even where this can be established, does not in itself, of course, constitute proof that those books were used, and the only incontestable evidence that a woman read a book, in the way in which we understand the term, would be if she annotated it in her own hand. In the main we have to rely rather on the clues offered by circumstance to deduce interest. Alice Chaucer's removal in 1466 of a number of manuscripts from her Suffolk castle of Wingfield to her house at Ewelme in Oxfordshire, for instance, suggests that she required books as a matter of daily routine. Her selection of titles – which included several service books and a book of prick-song for her chapel, and didactic works in Latin, French and English, as well as Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames* and the French romance of the 'quarterfitz Emond' (later to be translated and printed by Caxton) – suggests an ease of acquaintance with many different types of book.<sup>29</sup> The list of books is included amongst Alice's estate papers – as

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impartial a source as it is possible to imagine, though one inevitably uninformative as to such details of the individual volumes as whether or not they were newly produced, and their quality.

It is, nevertheless, to women like Alice Chaucer, with power and wealth at their disposal, that we would expect to look for evidence of book-patronage, but in the case of one surviving manuscript which can be associated with her family, her involvement is far from clear. British Library Arundel MS 119 is a copy of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*. In the initial at the beginning of Book 1, on f. 4r, are the arms of Alice's third husband, William de la Pole, earl of Suffolk, surmounted by his crest.<sup>30</sup> Now Lydgate was a local author, and Alice had a proven interest in his work: she was the probable patron of his poem, *The Virtues of the Mass*, and 'a boke of English in papir of þe pilgrimage translated by daune Iohn lydgate out of frensh' was one of the volumes she had moved to Ewelme.<sup>31</sup> But was Arundel 119 a joint commission undertaken by husband and wife? Or was the book acquired on her husband's initiative alone? It has been suggested that Alice instigated an earlier commission which Lydgate had undertaken, that of the translation of Deguileville's *Pilgrimage*, although the patron was ostensibly her second husband, Thomas Montacute, earl of Salisbury. May she not have also played a crucial role in the production of the Arundel manuscript, containing perhaps the best extant text of the *Thebes*?<sup>32</sup> Similarly, British Library Royal MS 19.A.XIX, a copy of Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames*, has the fetterlock and white rose badges of the House of York added to the opening page of the text, and the book has therefore been associated with Richard, duke of York, who could have bought it during one of his many visits to France during the course of his career. But he was married to a woman who was herself a notable book-collector, Cecily Neville: could the book, with its apt dedication to women of all social classes, therefore rather have been acquired for her?<sup>33</sup> These are not the only occasions on which it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between the activities of a married couple, for even where heraldic devices within a manuscript suggest joint ownership, they offer little in the way of positive evidence of the impetus informing patronage or acquisition. British Library Royal MS 17.D.VI, for example, a copy of *The Regiment of Princes* and other works by Hoccleve, has the arms of Joan Neville, countess of Salisbury (d. 1462), imposed upon the original decoration of f. 4r. Those of her husband, William Fitzalan, earl of Arundel (d. 1488) appear similarly imposed on f. 4or. Who, therefore, bought the book? Does the prime position given to Joan Neville's arms indicate that she did? Or was the book acquired for a 'family' library?<sup>34</sup>

Uncertainty such as this ensures that certain of the book-owning and

commissioning activities of women remain invisible, and it can be argued that, as was seen to be the case with wills, the evidence for such activities is only unequivocal when a woman was a widow. Even where it is possible to be precise about female patronage, though, we may come up against a reluctance to allow women their due. In the middle of the fifteenth century Anne Neville, duchess of Buckingham, commissioned one of the best-known psalters produced in London during that period, Part II of New York Public Library Spencer MS 3, the so-called 'Wingfield Hours', named after a sixteenth-century (male) owner. The book was characterised by eight splendid illustrative miniatures (only six of which now survive). The heraldic badges in the borders suggest ownership by one of the Staffords, Anne's family by marriage, and this led one early commentator to assume that the manuscript had in fact been made for her husband, Humphrey Stafford, first duke of Buckingham, who died in 1460. It was only because it was noticed that some of the prayers had been written for female use, and specifically for a woman named 'Anna', that the attribution was corrected.<sup>35</sup> Where no manuscripts are extant, matters are less easily resolved, as is illustrated by the late-fourteenth-century library of Eleanor de Bohun. An important part of the directions making up Eleanor's testament relates to books, as she took pains to distribute them amongst her children in a way which would be appropriate for their respective callings in life. To her daughter, Isabella, a minoress, for instance, she bequeathed a French bible and book of decretals, a book of lives of the fathers, 'les pastorelx Seint Gregoire', and other devotional books. To her son Humphrey, on the other hand, she left texts which centred on chivalry and the active life: a chronicle of France, Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum*, a book of vices and virtues, the Bohun ancestral romance of the 'chivaler a cigne', and a richly illuminated psalter which had belonged to her father, and which she wished to remain in the family line, passing from heir to heir. She is known to have commissioned, on her own account, the Edinburgh Psalter, National Library of Scotland Advocates' MS 18.6.5. Her concerns are quite consistent with those displayed by other members of her family, in particular her father, and her younger sister, Mary, both of whom were active as patrons.<sup>36</sup> Now Eleanor was married to Thomas, duke of Gloucester, whose death in 1397 occasioned the compilation of an inventory of goods which is justly famous for its collection of books.<sup>37</sup> Yet few historians have acknowledged the role which Eleanor may have had to play in the establishing and augmenting of this library, in spite of her proven interest.<sup>38</sup>

Problematic though the interpretation of the surviving evidence may therefore be, there are, nevertheless, many positive conclusions which can

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be drawn about women's connections with books. Eleanor and Mary Bohun, for instance, were not alone in their commissioning of high-quality manuscripts. Many of the finest psalters and books of hours dating from the fourteenth century were produced at the instigation of women, and this tradition seems to have continued into the fifteenth century, if the Hours owned by Anne Neville in the middle of the century, and those commissioned by Margaret, duchess of Clarence (d. 1439/40), may be taken as representative witnesses.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, if the evidence presented by book-patronage is taken together with that of wills, it would seem that religion was by far the dominant reading interest of medieval women; they owned a variety of texts in addition to their service books, ranging from lives of the saints, to didactic works such as *The Prick of Conscience* and *Pore Caitif*, to various of the treatises of the fourteenth-century mystics, Walter Hilton and Richard Rolle.<sup>40</sup> Works by the two last-mentioned authors would, presumably, have been considered particularly appropriate for a female readership, given that both men wrote extensively for women during their lifetimes. Hilton, especially, appears to have continued to exert a powerful influence on women's spirituality throughout the later Middle Ages.<sup>41</sup> The suggestion of this dominance is confirmed by what little is known of later-medieval patronage of living writers. Many of Lydgate's patrons for his minor religious works, for example, were women. Alice Chaucer has already been mentioned, but her name may be added to a list which includes Anne, countess of Stafford (daughter of Eleanor Bohun), for whom he wrote the *Invocation to St Anne*, and her daughter, Anne, whose first marriage was to Edmund Mortimer, fifth earl of March, for whom he composed the *Legend of St Margaret*; and Isabella Despenser, who was his patron for the *Fifteen Joys of Our Lady*.<sup>42</sup> This network of aristocratic women concerned directly with patronage and with religious writing may be extended. Isabella Despenser, for instance, was the second wife of Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, and Beauchamp's first wife, Elizabeth Berkeley, was patron of John Walton's 1410 verse translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, a work which reveals a sophisticated taste for philosophical and theological speculation.<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth's daughter, Margaret, was the owner of a fine book of hours made in France, but of the use of Sarum, and with English prayers added, which is now in Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum MS 41-1950; the book was made possibly on the occasion of her marriage to John Talbot, first earl of Shrewsbury. Another book of hours owned by Margaret and John Talbot, Fitzwilliam Museum 40-1950, has the prayer to St Albon from Lydgate's *Lives of St Albon and St Amphabell* (1424) copied into it, and the fact that Margaret also commissioned from Lydgate one of the rare historical works connected with a

female patron, his *Guy of Warwick*, which celebrated the exploits of her legendary ancestor, suggests that she had a particular interest in this writer.<sup>44</sup>

The patterns of interconnectedness illustrated here are, in the main, familial, but in the circle of women connected with one of Lydgate's literary followers, Osbern Bokenham, the patterns are based rather more closely on regional affiliations. The collection of saints' lives written by Bokenham and now known as the *Legendys of Hooly Wummen* was, according to the colophon at the end of the unique manuscript (British Library Arundel MS 327), gathered together to be presented by an Austin friar, Thomas Burgh, perhaps to his sister and her fellow-nuns, in 1447.<sup>45</sup> But of the thirteen discrete legends, six are explicitly written for laywomen in the East Anglian region. (Bokenham himself was evidently resident in Clare, probably at the Augustinian friary, when he dedicated his legend of St Margaret to Thomas Burgh.)<sup>46</sup> It seems unlikely that all six of Bokenham's female dedicatees were patrons, in the strict sense of the word: only in the case of the legends of Saints Mary Magdalene and Elizabeth of Hungary does he state that he wrote at the specific request of two women, respectively Isabel Bouchier, countess of Eu, and Elizabeth de Vere, countess of Oxford.<sup>47</sup> But again the suggestion to be derived from the dedications as a group, that these women shared an interest in religious matters, and specifically in a female experience of religion, is consonant with that derived from elsewhere. Elizabeth de Vere, for instance, donated a manuscript containing devotional treatises in French to Barking Abbey, and the *Life* which she requested from Bokenham, of the king's daughter who lived the mixed life of action and contemplation within the Christian institution of marriage, strikes a particular resonance in the fifteenth century when Walter Hilton's work achieved a wide circulation amongst women.<sup>48</sup> To this particular local network may be added the unnamed 'gentill woman' for whom another East Anglian Augustinian friar, John Capgrave of Lynn, wrote his prose *Life of St Augustine*.<sup>49</sup>

Although some of the devotional and didactic works owned by women were written in French, as we have seen, the language of the majority is English, and the fact that many of these English texts were translations – whether commissioned or not – suggests that this was the vernacular with which most women felt at ease. But this was not necessarily so. Indeed, there is a certain careless familiarity about Alice West's reference to 'alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englich, and frensch' in her will which should caution us against any rigid association of women with a particular language.<sup>50</sup> Evidence of women's ability to understand Latin is, it is true, comparatively hard to find,<sup>51</sup> but that they were habituated to reading



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French is strongly indicated by what can be deduced about their ownership of romances, which form the second largest generic grouping amongst women's books in the Middle Ages as a whole.

Whilst the linking of individual romances with female patrons during the earlier medieval period is, in some instances, traditional rather than proven,<sup>52</sup> the surviving evidence strongly suggests that Chaucer's (or the Nun's Priest's) jibe against women who 'holde in ful greet reverence' 'the book of Launcelot de Lake' had some basis in fact.<sup>53</sup> This is not to say that the taste for Arthurian romance, and the story of Lancelot in particular, was an exclusively female one – men bequeathed Arthurian texts to their daughters, sisters and wives, and women left them to their sons and husbands, as well as to their daughters – but tales connected with the Arthurian world certainly do figure largely amongst the romances owned by women. That Isabella of France was a keen reader of romance is indicated by the list of books in her possession at her death in 1352; aside from *chansons de geste* such as *Aimeri de Narbonne* and 'de Duce de Basyns', she had a Trojan romance ('de bello troiano', possibly by Benoit) and three Arthurian texts: 'de gestis Arthuri', 'de Tristram et Isolda' and 'de Perceual et Gauwayn'.<sup>54</sup> In the last decade of the fourteenth century Isabel, duchess of York, bequeathed to her son Edward her 'marchart' (probably to be identified as a manuscript of Guillaume de Machaut's poems) and her 'launcelot', whilst among the six books left to her husband by Elizabeth Darcy in 1411 was one secular text – 'Lanselake'.<sup>55</sup> Thomas Hebbeden, spiritual chancellor to Thomas Langley, bishop of Durham, clearly took care in his will of 1435 in deciding who should receive his books: to Isabella Eure, a member of a prominent Northern family, he left 'unum librum gallicum vocatum Launcelot', while his copy of Guido de Columnis's *Historia destructionis Troiae* went to 'magister Johanni Artays de Dunelm'. Perhaps he viewed the latter as a text more suited to a male readership, particularly since it was a Latin composition.<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth la Zouche owned two Arthurian texts, a 'Lanchelot' and a 'Tristrem', both of which she left to her husband in 1380, while Margaret Courtenay, countess of Devon, whose will is dated 1390/91, possessed three: her 'livre appelle Tristram' she left to her daughter 'Luttrell'; her 'Artur de Britaigne' (perhaps *Arthur of Little Britain*) went, along with her two primers, to her daughter 'Dangayne'; and to Anneys Chambernon she left her 'merlyn', together with her book of vices and virtues and 'un livre de medycynys et de marchasye'.<sup>57</sup>

The romance of Tristram seems to have shared an equal popularity with that of Lancelot. The copy belonging to Isabella of France has already been mentioned. Over a century later, the signature of Elizabeth of York appears

in British Library Harley MS 49, containing part of the French prose *Tristan*, which had earlier belonged to her uncle, Richard III.<sup>58</sup> Joan Beaufort, countess of Westmoreland (d. 1440), was left 'unum librum vocat Tristram' by her brother, Thomas, duke of Exeter, on his death in 1426; and dame Matilda Bowes, of Yorkshire, bequeathed to 'Elizabethae filiae Whitchestre unum librum yat is called Trystram' in 1420.<sup>59</sup> The fact that the romance is often given its anglicised title might suggest currency for a Middle English translation (if not necessarily the one which survives uniquely in the early fourteenth-century Auchinleck manuscript); but Sir John le Scrope's bequest in 1405 of his 'librum de gallico vocatum Tristrem' to his daughter Joan demonstrates how unreliable the evidence of titles alone can be as a basis for drawing such conclusions.<sup>60</sup> The language of a copy of a romance associated with the Tristan cycle, *Guiron le Courtois*, owned in two volumes by Matilda or Maud Clifford, countess of Cambridge, and bequeathed in 1446 by her to Alesia, daughter of Thomas Montacute, earl of Salisbury and wife to the 'Kingmaker' earl of Warwick, is again specified as French.<sup>61</sup> Court circles provided an audience for other Arthurian works, too: British Library Royal MS 14.E.III, containing the Vulgate *Queste* and *Mort Artu*, was left by Sir Richard Roos, putative translator of Chartier's *La Belle Dame sans Mercy*, to his niece, Alyanor Hawte, in 1482. Under the Lancastrians Alyanor had been a *domicella* to Margaret of Anjou, and her third marriage, to Richard Hawte, who shared kinship with Edward IV's queen, Elizabeth Wydville, continued her affiliation with the court. (Her last recorded public appearance was at the christening of Prince Arthur in 1486.) Alyanor inscribed the Royal manuscript with her *ex libris*, but the fact that the names of E[li]zabeth] Wydville and her daughters, Elizabeth and Cecily, also appear in the volume suggests that Alyanor gave it as a gift to the queen: the inventory of the library of Richmond Palace made in 1535 records the presence of 'Le St. Gral, donné à la Roïne', strong circumstantial evidence that the two books were one and the same. If this is so, then Alyanor's choice of gift is likely to have been an informed one.<sup>62</sup>

The popularity, and widespread circulation, of Arthurian texts is self-evident. Instances of the ownership of other, non-Arthurian, romances may be found, but most titles are represented in single citations. Margaret Beaufort, for example, bought a copy of the French version of *Blanchardin and Eglantine* from Caxton, and Alice Chaucer, as we have seen, possessed *The Four Sons of Aymon*, a Charlemagne romance.<sup>63</sup> Margaret Roos, wife of the Richard Roos mentioned above, wrote an ownership inscription, in French, on the flyleaf of the copy of the *Vœux du Paon* now New York Public Library Spencer MS 9.<sup>64</sup> Joan Beaufort, in addition to her copy of

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*Tristram*, owned versions of *The Chronicles of Jerusalem* and *Godfrey de Bouillon* in one volume, which she lent to Henry V: on his death she had to recover the book from his executors.<sup>65</sup> Where no manuscript copy survives it seems safest to assume that most, if not all, of these romances were in French. Evidence that women were reading romances in English is, paradoxically perhaps, less easy to come by, and we are in the main reliant on extant manuscripts for information.

The copy of the prose *Merlin*, a translation from the French which pre-dated Malory's *Arthuriad* by only a few years, was owned by Elyanor Guldeford, a member of a Kentish family prominent at the courts of Henry VII and his son,<sup>66</sup> but this is one of the few examples of a manuscript of an English text where female ownership can be asserted with any confidence. The name 'anne hampton' occurs on f. 39r of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 80, the sole surviving copy of the translations of the *Holy Grail* and the *Merlin* made by the London skinner, Henry Lovelich, in the first half of the fifteenth century, and the same hand appears to have been responsible for glossing passages highlighting the ancestors of Lancelot.<sup>67</sup> It is hardly an unequivocal piece of evidence of female ownership or readership. We are on surer ground where another Cambridge manuscript is concerned, however, for the so-called 'Findern' manuscript from southern Derbyshire, Cambridge University Library MS ff. 1.6, containing the romance of *Sir Degrevant*, shows every sign of having been assembled as a women's book. Of the many names which occur on its pages the majority (and these the earliest) are those of women, most of whom were connected by ties of family or propinquity.<sup>68</sup> Aside from these examples, circumstantial evidence, once again, must suffice. The balance of probability is in favour of female ownership of the Vernon manuscript, for instance (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS poetry A.1), which contains *Joseph of Arimathea* and the *King of Tars*; and it is possible that Oxford, Bodleian Library Digby MS 181, containing *King Ponthus and the Fair Sidone* in addition to the *Brut* and works by Hoccleve, was the 'booke of Englissh callid Ocliff' bequeathed by Thomasin Hopton to her son in 1498.<sup>69</sup> Another book of East Anglian provenance, Cambridge, Trinity College MS O.5.2, containing the rhyme-royal version of *Generydes* and Lydgate's *Troy Book* and *Siege of Thebes*, may, it has been suggested, have been in the possession of Anne Knevet of Buckenham Castle in Norfolk, at the time of her marriage to John Thwaites, between 1480 and 1490; and the *Thebes* was owned by another Norfolk woman, Anne Paston, sister of the better-known book-collector, John Paston.<sup>70</sup> The *Troy Book* was one of several books left by Margaret Beaufort to her son, Henry VII, on her death in 1509, and Lydgate's text may have been the work described as 'Le Siege de

Troye' which Walter Hungerford set aside for Elizabeth Courtenay when he made his will in 1449.<sup>71</sup>

From the discussion so far it is clear that women formed an important part of Lydgate's primary and secondary audiences for both his secular and religious works. But it is by no means obvious that they constituted as significant a proportion of the audience for other English poets. On the basis of documentary evidence, Chaucer, for example, would appear not to have been particularly widely read by women, either during or after his lifetime.<sup>72</sup> Two of the sixteen extant manuscripts of *Troilus and Criseyde* contain the probable signatures of women: the inscription 'neuer Foryeteth Anne neuill' occurs on f. 101v of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 61; and the names of 'anne norres' and 'anne nevell' occur in later (probably sixteenth-century) hands in British Library Harley MS 4912.<sup>73</sup> The association of surviving copies of the *Canterbury Tales* with female owners is often tenuous, at best, and there is no recorded evidence of female ownership of the text in the early fifteenth century, although Sir Thomas Cumberworth left to his niece Annes Constable in 1451 'my boke of the talys of cantyrbury'; and twenty years later Lady Elizabeth Bruyn of Essex left hers, together with 'j double harpe', to a young man named Robert Walsall.<sup>74</sup> John St John, a kinsman of Lady Margaret Beaufort, was the recipient of her vellum copy in the early sixteenth century.<sup>75</sup> Evidence of women reading Gower is less sparse; Joan Beaufort was bequeathed 'unum librum de Anglico vocatum Gower pro remembrancia' by Sir John Morton of York in 1431; and the signature of Jaquette of Luxembourg, wife successively of John, duke of Bedford and Richard Wydville, first earl Rivers, has recently been recovered in the copy of the *Confessio* which is now Cambridge, Pembroke College MS 307; and Margaret Beaufort, again, owned a copy, which she left to another woman on her death.<sup>76</sup> Excerpts from the text also occur in the Findern manuscript, alongside some of the minor poems of Chaucer, such as *The Parliament of Fowls* and the *Complaint of Anelida*.<sup>77</sup>

Surprising as it may seem that there is so little documentation of women's interest in the work of two of the major writers of the later medieval period, it has to be acknowledged that the evidence of their interest may simply not have survived. Where other kinds of text are concerned there is a comparable lack of documentation. Historical writing, for instance, achieves only some small measure of representation: Sir Thomas Ughtred of Kexby, near York, left his wife a copy of the *Brut* in French in 1398, and Princeton University Library Garrett MS 150, a copy of the same work in English, was presumably in the possession of Anne Andrew of Bailham, Suffolk, in the late fifteenth century, since the

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signatures of her two husbands, Sir John Sulyard and Sir Thomas Bouchier, both occur on its flyleaves.<sup>78</sup> The exact nature of another text, the 'librum de gallico de Veteribus Historiis' which Sir Robert de Roos of Ingmanthorpe left to his daughter-in-law Joan in 1392, remains obscure, as does the identification of the 'booke of Frosard' left by the lawyer Thomas Kebell to Mary Hungerford, granddaughter of Lady Margaret Hungerford and daughter-in-law of William, Lord Hastings, in 1500. It is a matter for conjecture whether the latter is more likely to have been a copy of the *Chroniques* of Froissart, or his love poems, or even his romance of *Meliador*.<sup>79</sup> With regard to texts that women might be expected to have taken a keen interest in, however, the situation is more encouraging. Although the religious writings of English women had a restricted circulation in manuscript in the Middle Ages, those of Continental mystics enjoyed a wide, and varied, audience.<sup>80</sup> Equally, the work of the contemporary French writer Christine de Pizan seems to have been in demand by women. Some indication has already been given of the interest in her *Cité des Dames*, a text which also formed part of the superbly produced anthology of her poetry and prose, British Library Harley MS 4431, which bears the signature of Jaquette of Luxembourg.<sup>81</sup> Later in the century, in 1472, Anne Stafford, daughter of the Anne Neville who commissioned Part II of NYPL Spencer 3, left her 'boke with the pistilles of Othea' to her sister-in-law, Margaret Beaufort. It is unclear whether this was a copy of Christine's original text in French, or whether it was the English translation made by Stephen Scrope: the latter had been dedicated to Anne Stafford's father, Humphrey, duke of Buckingham, and was later rededicated to a 'high princess'.<sup>82</sup> The version of the text owned by Anne Harling, however, was certainly in French, since she specifies the language in her bequest of the book to 'my lord of Surrey' in 1498.<sup>83</sup>

If the discussion so far goes some way towards defining the eclecticism of women's book-owning and reading interests – interests which, incidentally, defy the prescriptive dictates of those who sought to control women's access to the written word<sup>84</sup> – it is also suggestive of ways in which our understanding of women's connections with books may be enriched. Felicity Riddy, in her essay in this volume, has written of the way in which the religious interests of lay and enclosed women overlapped, and the whole question of women's reading networks and circles is one which would amply repay investigation. Religion was clearly a shared concern for many. The will of Agnes Stapleton, with its substantial collection of religious texts, has already been referred to,<sup>85</sup> but it is of note that despite numerous bequests to male, as well as female, monastic institutions, it was only to the female houses that she left books. Her decision could obviously

have been taken for any one of a number of reasons, but it may be that she had in mind the comparative poverty of nunneries, where incomes were low and resources few.<sup>86</sup> It is also of note that her bequest to Denney, in Cambridgeshire, was the only one she made beyond her locale in Yorkshire. Such supportive networks may be traced elsewhere. Joan Holand, countess of Kent and wife of the founder of the Carthusian priory of Mount Grace in Yorkshire, owned a copy of Nicholas Love's *Myrrour*, now Tokyo, Takamiya MS 8, which she gave to Alice Belacyse; she gave another devotional text – this time one specifically directed to women, the French translation of the *Ancrene Riwe* – to Eleanor Cobham, second wife of Humphrey, duke of Gloucester.<sup>87</sup> And the circle surrounding Margaret Beaufort is noted for the way in which books were exchanged as gifts: Elizabeth Scrope, widow of Thomas, Lord Scrope, in her will of 1513/14 left to her sister 'my boke, that is a Premer, and a Sawter, which boke I had of the gifte of the most excellent princes King Henry the Sevenythis mother'; and Cambridge, St John's College MS N. 24, a book of hours of the use of Coutances, bears an inscription asking the recipient, 'lady Shyrley', to pray for Lady Margaret, who had given her the book.<sup>88</sup> Lady Margaret was associated with her daughter-in-law, Elizabeth of York, in her gift of a copy of Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*, printed at her request by Wynkyn de Worde, to Mary Roos, and Elizabeth is known to have given similar presents on her own account: Katherine, Lady Hastings, widow of William, Lord Hastings, on her death in 1503 left a 'fair primer' given to her by Queen Elizabeth to her son, Edward.<sup>89</sup> Religion was not the only common area of interest for women, however, as Royal 14.E.III, the French Arthurian romance discussed earlier, suggests. In addition to the names of Elizabeth Wydville and her daughters appears that of 'Jane Grey', and this same name, badly faded, appears on the rear pastedown of Princeton University Library Garrett MS 168, an account of the funeral of the Turkish emperor Mohammed II, a manuscript which also carries the names of Elizabeth and Cecily of York.<sup>90</sup>

The extent to which these networks are based on family relationships, a point which arose in the discussion of Lydgate and his female patrons, is clearly another question to be considered. It may be remarked that several of the women whose names have recurred with greatest frequency in this paper were related. Joan Beaufort, for instance, was the mother of Anne and Cecily Neville, both of whom are significant figures in the history of piety and book-patronage in the fifteenth century, as we have seen.<sup>91</sup> The interests of Joan herself were by no means absorbed by romance: Hoccleve was sufficiently aware of her interest in poetry to dedicate an autograph copy of his works to her, and her piety is demonstrated by her possible

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possession of Cambridge University Library Additional MS 3042, Rolle's *Meditations on the Passion*, and by the fact that Margery Kempe received a warm welcome from her.<sup>92</sup> Another mother–daughter relationship to be noted in this context is that of Eleanor Bohun and Anne Stafford. Yet other family relationships may have been of equal significance. It was to her daughter-in-law, for example, not her daughter, that Lady Alice West left all her books – except, that is, her ‘peyre Matyns bookis’ which had belonged to her husband: these, together with ‘a peire bedes’ and the ring with which she was ‘yspoused to god’, which had also belonged to her husband, she left to her son.<sup>93</sup> The role of women within families with well-known literary interests would also be worth charting. Much has been made, for example, of the group of so-called ‘Lollard knights’ who gathered at the court of Richard II, the best known of whom is probably Sir John Clanvowe, the author of the devotional treatise *The Two Ways* and (possibly) the Chaucerian-influenced *Boke of Cupid*.<sup>94</sup> But the 1422 will of Lady Peryne Clanvowe, widow of Sir John's heir (who was either his son or his nephew) is also of interest.<sup>95</sup> It is characterised by a disdain of the body and a distaste for worldly pomp, whilst great emphasis is placed on charity and good works. Lady Peryne left a few books: to her brother, her ‘massbooke and Chalys’, together with a chapel vestment of cloth of gold; to her priest, ‘sir Reynold . . . iiij quayres of Doctours on Mathewe’; and to one of her executors, Elizabeth Joye, ‘a booke of Englyssh, cleped “pore caytife”’. The particular brand of piety which is evoked by the terms of the will suggests that much could be gathered about religious trends, as well as individual preferences, by looking into the devotional practices and tastes of other women associated with the chamber knights of Richard II.<sup>96</sup>

Much work, then, remains to be done, and there are many questions still to be answered. What is becoming clear, though, is the extent to which it is desirable, even necessary, to recover the details of women's lives – both collectively and individually – in the effort to understand more fully their engagement with literature, and with books in general. Their everyday activities, their social and economic status, and their family and social networks and relationships, all seem to have had a bearing on their role as the readers, owners and patrons of books. Yet it is not only those aspects of their lives which can be documented historically which are likely to prove significant in this search: the influence of iconographic models on women's perceptions of themselves as the owners and users of books may prove to have been just as crucial a determinant.<sup>97</sup> Margaret Hungerford's seal offers a tantalising glimpse into the way in which religious iconography can be used to construct a public self-image, but, equally, analysis of the religious images in women's private devotional manuscripts, where these survive,

may serve to illuminate our understanding of what motivated and shaped their religious practices.<sup>98</sup> By following lines of enquiry such as these, it may be possible to assess the distinctive nature of the contribution which women made to medieval literary culture.

## NOTES

- 1 The quotation is taken from the will of Lady Alice West of Hinton Marcel, Hampshire, dated 15 July, 1395; it is printed in F. J. Furnivall (ed.), *Fifty Earliest English Wills*, EETS OS 78 (1882), 4–10, p. 5. The decision to confine the scope of this essay to a discussion of laywomen and their books, and to exclude women religious, was taken on purely pragmatic grounds, given the amount of material which a more comprehensive survey would generate. That there may be a significant overlap in the interests of secular and religious women is indicated, for example, by Felicity Riddy's contribution to this volume. Earlier versions of this paper were delivered at the conference on 'Medieval Women: Work, Spirituality, Literacy and Patronage' held at the University of York, September, 1990, and to the Medieval Society of the University of Birmingham. I am grateful to both these audiences for their responses and questions. I should also like to thank Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards for their generosity and helpful conversations.
- 2 The seal is described in W. G. Birch, *Catalogue of Seals in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 6 vols. (London: British Museum, 1887–1900), no. 10,912 [BM XCII.23]; and see also C. H. Hunter Blair, 'Armorial upon English Seals from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Centuries', *Archaeologia* 89 (1943), 1–26, p. 26. For Margaret's motto, her 'worde', see the evidence presented by her will, cited in n. 5 below. The scroll is shown as being intact in the drawing which forms the frontispiece to Nicholas Harris Nicolas, *Testamenta vetusta*, 2 vols. (London: Nichols, 1826).
- 3 On the figure of the Virgin of Humility see Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), I, p. 128, where he notes the popularity of the theme in England and Flanders; and II, figs. 198, 226. See also Ellen Muller, 'Saintly Virgins: The Veneration of Virgin Saints in Religious Women's Communities', in Lène Dresen-Coenders (ed.), *Saints and She-Devils: Images of Women in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (London: The Rubicon Press, 1987), 83–100, pp. 84, 86.
- 4 See e.g. the fragmentary painting, 'The Magdalen', by Roger van der Weyden, now in the National Gallery, London, and the drawing of St Barbara by Jan van Eyck now in the Musée Royale, Antwerp; and the painting of the latter saint by the Master of Flémalle, in the Werl altarpiece, the Prado, Madrid (see, respectively, Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, II, figs. 316, 254; and I, pp. 172–3 and II, fig. 213). The panel by the Master of the Ursula Legend in the Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België, Brussels, also shows St Barbara kneeling, and reading (Muller, 'Saintly Virgins', pp. 90, 91). Cf.



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- Muller, p. 89, for a panel by the Master of 1499 showing the Virgin and Child with Saints Catherine, Dorothea, Barbara and Agnes; now in Virginia Museum, The Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund, Richmond. Here, Catherine and Agnes both sit with open books in their laps.
- 5 Walter Hungerford's will is in Lambeth Palace Library, Register of Archbishop Stafford, ff. 114–117b; and that of Margaret Hungerford (dealing with her chattels) in Salisbury, Wiltshire Records Office, 490/1544. I have consulted the transcriptions in Devizes Museum, Canon Jackson's Hungerford Family Collections, Personal, i, respectively ff. 112r–114r and 269r–78v. The most personal of Margaret's bequests seems to have been the 'matyns boke' which was 'coverd with blewe velwette and clapsed with silver and gilte with my worde "Myne assured trouth"', which she left to her granddaughter, Mary, on whom see below p. 143 and n. 79. The Brigettine service book is unlikely to have been a copy of the English *Myroure of our Ladye*, as suggested by M. A. Hicks, 'The Piety of Margaret, Lady Hungerford (d. 1478)', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38 (1987), 19–38, pp. 23–4: see Ann M. Hutchison, 'Devotional Reading in the Monastery and in the Late Medieval Household', in Michael G. Sargent (ed.), *De cella in seculum: Religion and Secular Life and Devotion in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), 215–27, p. 223, n. 26. On a fourteenth-century service book which belonged to the Hungerford family, and which contains the obits of Lady Margaret and her husband, see Janet Backhouse, 'An English Calendar c. 1330', in C. de Hamel and R. A. Linenthal (eds.), *Fine Books and Book-Collecting. Books and Manuscripts Acquired from Alan Thomas and Described by his Customers on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (Leamington Spa: James Hall, 1981), pp. 8–10, and M. A. Michael, 'Deconstruction, Reconstruction and Invention: The Hungerford Hours and English Manuscript Illumination of the Early Fourteenth Century', in Peter Beal and Jeremy Griffiths (eds.), *English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700*, 11 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 33–108.
- 6 See Hicks, 'The Piety of Margaret, Lady Hungerford'.
- 7 I am most grateful to Dr T. A. Heslop for his comments on Margaret's seal, and for his observation that the iconographical detail is 'unusual'. He suggested to me in correspondence that it may be of foreign manufacture, but my efforts to trace similar iconography on seals from France and the Low Countries have not proved successful. The sources I have checked are: G. Demay, *Inventaire des sceaux de la Flandre*, 2 vols. (Paris: l'Imprimerie Nationale, 1873), and *Inventaire des sceaux de la Normandie* (Paris: l'Imprimerie Nationale, 1881); L. Douët d'Arcq, *Collection de sceaux des archives de l'Empire*, 3 vols. (Paris: Henri Plon, 1863–8); F. Eygun, *Sigillographie du Poitou jusqu'en 1515* (Poitiers: au Siège de la Société des Antiquaires de l'Ouest, 1938); and J. Roman, *Description des sceaux des familles seigneuriales du Dauphiné* (Grenoble: Imprimerie de Maisonville, etc., 1906). Whilst books do occasionally feature on the women's seals represented here, they are always shown being held by the standing figures of abbesses, and they thus function as a symbol of office and/or vocation.
- 8 The will was the document in which lands were disposed, whereas testaments dealt with a testator's moveable property, his or her chattels; see K. B.

- McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 209–10, n. 2.
- 9 J. Raine (ed.), *Testamenta Eboracensia*, II, Surtees Society 30 (1855), 153–57, p. 156.
  - 10 J. Raine (ed.), *Testamenta Eboracensia*, IV, Surtees Society 53 (1868), 149–54, p. 153. Anne Harling's piety is discussed by Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 96–106. On her books see further below, p. 143 and n. 83.
  - 11 H. R. Plomer, 'Books Mentioned in Wills', *Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 7 (1902–4), 99–121, p. 115.
  - 12 Carol M. Meale, 'The Manuscripts and Early Audience of the Middle English Prose *Merlin*', in A. Adams, A. Diverres *et al.* (eds.), *The Changing Face of Arthurian Romance: from Chrétien de Troyes to the End of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1986), pp. 92–111; P. W. Fleming, 'The Hautes and their "Circle": Culture and the English Gentry', in Daniel Williams (ed.), *England in the Fifteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1986 Harlaxton Symposium* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1987), pp. 85–102. For details of Katherine's life see W. G. Davis, *The Ancestry of Mary Isaac, c. 1549–1613* (Portland, Maine: Anthoensen Press, 1955), pp. 180–5. Her will is in London, PRO Prob. 11/10, f. 25r–v; there is a summary of this in Isaac, pp. 183–4.
  - 13 The fact that one of her daughters was named 'Grisell' may (or may not) be of significance with regard to her literary interests.
  - 14 J. S. W. Gibson, *Wills and Where to Find Them* (Chichester: Phillimore, for the British Record Society, 1974).
  - 15 Caroline M. Barron, 'The "Golden Age" of Women in Medieval London', *Reading Medieval Studies* 15 (1989), 35–58.
  - 16 Colin Richmond, *John Hopton: A Fifteenth Century Suffolk Gentleman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 117–18.
  - 17 See e.g. the wills of Beatrix Barton, widow of a vintner (1379), who left a portiforium; and Margery Broun (1381), who left an old missal and 'a book of the service of St Anne', in R. R. Sharpe (ed.), *Calendar of Wills Proved and Enrolled in the Court of Husting, London*, 2 vols (London: HMSO, 1890), II, pp. 210, 220–1; and Elizabeth Burlee, who in 1403 left a psalter to a mercer, mentioned by Robert A. Wood, 'A Fourteenth Century London Owner of *Piers Plowman*', *Medium Aevum* 53 (1984), 83–9, p. 88, n. 22.
  - 18 For these wills see, respectively, Mrs Hilary Jenkinson and G. Herbert Fowler, 'Some Bedfordshire Wills at Lambeth and Lincoln', *Publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society* 14 (1931), 79–131, pp. 123–25; and A. Clark (ed.), *Lincoln Diocese Documents 1450–1544*, EETS OS 149 (1914), pp. 37–45. I am indebted to Jenny Stratford for her kindness in sharing her work on Joan Buckland with me, and for letting me read the paper on Joan which she gave at a conference on 'The Widows of Medieval London' in October, 1990. Further information on Joan and her husband may be found in J. Stratford, *Three Inventories of the Goods of John, Duke of Bedford (d. 1435)* (London: for the Society of Antiquaries, forthcoming).
  - 19 Her piety is suggested in part by the numerous – and generous – bequests she

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- made to priests, including the rector of Edgcote, Master John Trotter, as well as to religious houses.
- 20 On the general question of the business activities of women within the merchant class, and their probable level of educational attainments, see Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London, 1300-1500* (Michigan, 1948; repr. Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1962), pp. 170-2, and cf. n. 25 below.
  - 21 See the essays by Julia Boffey, Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, Bella Millett and Felicity Riddy.
  - 22 S. B. Meech and H. E. Allen (eds.), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, EETS OS 212 (1940), p. 21. For a literary parallel see the account of St Elizabeth of Hungary who, as a child and unable to read, 'wold vse / To han a sauter opyn beforn hyr sprad', in Mary S. Serjeantson (ed.), *Legendys of Hooly Wummen by Osbern Bokenham*, EETS OS 206 (1938), p. 260, lines 9577-80.
  - 23 *Testamenta Eboracensia*, II, 28-29, p. 29; and cf. the discussions of this bequest by Eileen Power, 'The Position of Women in the Middle Ages', in G. C. Crump and E. F. Jacob (eds.), *The Legacy of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 431; and Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran, *The Growth of English Schooling 1340-1548: Learning, Literacy and Laicization in Pre-Reformation York Diocese* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 172-3.
  - 24 For the household reading of Cecily Neville and Margaret Beaufort see C. A. J. Armstrong, 'The Piety of Cicely, Duchess of York: A Study in Late Mediaeval Culture', in Douglas Woodruff (ed.), *For Hilaire Belloc. Essays in Honour of his 72nd Birthday* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1942), pp. 73-94, repr. in Armstrong, *England, France and Burgundy in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Hambledon, 1973), 135-56, pp. 141-2; and Retha M. Warnicke, 'The Lady Margaret, Countess of Richmond (d. 1509), as seen by Bishop Fisher and by Lord Morley', *Moreana* 19 (1982), 47-55, p. 51. On the Lollards see Claire Cross, '"Great Reasoners in Scripture": The Activities of Women Lollards 1380-1530', in Derek Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women*, Studies in Church History: Subsidia 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), pp. 359-80.
  - 25 There is, for example, evidence from the early fifteenth century that the two daughters of a London vintner were apprenticed to a notary public; see R. R. Sharpe (ed.), *Calendar of Letter-Books . . . of the City of London (Guildhall). Letter-Book I, c. A.D. 1400-1422* (London: HMSO, 1909), pp. 238, 141. And for discussion of a letter from Margery Cely to her Stapler husband, George, dated 1484, which Alison Hanham considers may well be an autograph, see A. Hanham (ed.), *The Cely Letters 1472-78*, EETS OS 273 (1975), no. 222; also *The Celys and their World: An English Merchant Family of the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 315. A further example, relating to the gentry, is more ambiguous: in December 1463 Brian Roucliffe wrote in a letter to Sir William Plumpton, whose granddaughter was married to his son, that 'Your daughter and myn . . . speaketh prattely and french and hath near hand learned her sawter', but although this may imply that the four-year-old Margaret was learning to read, it says nothing about her ability to write; see Thomas Stapleton (ed.), *Plumpton Correspondence*, Camden Society 4 (1839), pp. 7-8. On women of the nobility cf. n. 28 below.
  - 26 Henry Bergen (ed.), *Lydgate's Troy Book*, Part IV, EETS ES 126 (1935), pp. 50-2.

- 27 On the earlier fortunes of the Peche family see Thrupp, *Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 359, and J. C. Wedgwood, *History of Parliament: Biographies of the Members of the Commons House, 1439-1509* (London: HMSO, 1936), pp. 673-4. Sir John Peche's will, which was made in the presence of John Fisher, bishop of Rochester, is PRO Prob. 11/20, ff. 203v-204v. The identification of Elizabeth Peche is confirmed by her will, PRO Prob. 11/30, ff. 92r-v: although she mentions no books, among the bequests she made was one to John Goldwell, son of Agnes, and another to a 'mystres Page'; amongst the inscriptions in the Rawlinson MS is one on f. 247r, reading 'myne owne good lady peche / I pray yow to pray / ffor me yowr owne mayde Jane page' (and cf. ff. 293v, 294r), while the name 'John golldewell' occurs, together with a crude drawing of a man in mid-Tudor costume, on f. 386r (and cf. the rear pastedown).
- 28 On women's signatures see e.g. the selection reproduced in Mary Anne Everett Wood, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain - From the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, 3 vols. (London: Colburn, 1846).
- 29 See Oxford, Bodleian Library Ewelme Muniments A.vii.47 (3).
- 30 See C. E. Wright, *English Heraldic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1973), p. 20.
- 31 For *The Virtues of the Mass* see Henry Noble MacCracken (ed.), *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, Part I, EETS ES 107 (1911), pp. 87-115; Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 162 and Walter F. Schirmer, *John Lydgate: A Study in the Culture of the Fifteenth Century*, trans. Ann E. Keep (London: Methuen, 1961), p. 61. The rubric to the poem in Oxford, St John's College MS 56 states that it was written 'ad rogatum dominae comitissae de Suthefolcia', and although this could perhaps refer to the wives of either the second or third earls of Suffolk (both men were killed in the Agincourt campaign of 1415), Alice Chaucer would seem to be the most likely candidate for this act of patronage.
- 32 On the question of the identification of Lydgate's 'pilgrimage' see Richard Firth Green, 'Lydgate and Deguileville Once More', *Notes and Queries* 223 (1978), pp. 105-6, and on Alice's possible involvement, Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, p. 162. On Arundel 119 see Axel Erdmann and Eilbert Ekwall (eds.), *Lydgate: Siege of Thebes*, Part II, EETS ES 125 (1930), pp. 37-42.
- 33 On the manuscript see G. F. Warner and J. Gilson, *Catalogue of the Western Manuscripts in the Old Royal and King's Collections*, 4 vols. (London: British Museum, 1921), II, pp. 322-3; and on Cecily Neville, her will, printed in J. G. Nichols and J. Bruce (eds.) *Wills from Doctors Commons*, Camden Society 83 (1863), pp. 1-8, and Armstrong, 'The Piety of Cicely, Duchess of York'.
- 34 See Warner and Gilson, *Catalogue of Royal Manuscripts*, II, pp. 251-2; M. C. Seymour, 'The Manuscripts of Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*', *Transactions of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society*, 4, Part VII, (1974), 253-97, pp. 272-3. Warner and Gilson assume, without discussion, that the volume belonged to William Fitzalan.
- 35 M. R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Fifty Manuscripts from the Collection of*

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- Henry Yates Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898), pp. 130–8; *Illustrations from One Hundred Manuscripts in the Library of Henry Yates Thompson*, iv (London: Chiswick Press, 1914), pp. 45–7 and plates LXXVI–LXXXII.
- 36 Eleanor's will is printed in John Nichols (ed.), *A Collection of All the Wills Now Know to be Extant of the Kings and Queens of England* (London: Nichols, 1780), pp. 177–86. On the patronage of Eleanor, Mary and Humphrey see M. R. James, *The Bohun Manuscripts*, with introductory note by E. G. Millar (Oxford: for the Roxburghe Club, 1936); and Lucy Freeman Sandler, *Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles*, v: *Gothic Manuscripts 1285–1385*, 2 vols. (London: Harvey Millar and Oxford University Press, 1986).
  - 37 Viscount Dillon and W. H. St John Hope, 'Inventory of the Goods and Chattels belonging to Thomas, Duke of Gloucester', *Archaeological Journal* 54 (1897), 275–308; *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous (Chancery): Preserved in the Public Record Office*, vi, 1392–99 (London: HMSO, 1963), pp. 223–5.
  - 38 Anthony Goodman, for example, in *The Loyal Conspiracy: The Lords Appellant under Richard II* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 79–81, does acknowledge the probable importance of 'the traditions of the family' into which Gloucester married, emphasises the apparent piety of Eleanor's tastes, and suggests that the books listed as being in Gloucester's London house 'may have reflected his and his wife's reading habits'; but he also states that it is probable that many of the books at the castle of Pleshey 'were commissioned and acquired by his father-in-law Hereford'.
  - 39 See Sandler, *Gothic Manuscripts 1285–1385*, *passim*, for fourteenth-century patronage; and on the Clarence Hours, sold at Sotheby's, 19 June, 1989, Lot 3018, *Sotheby's Art at Auction* (London: Sotheby's Publications, 1989), p. 244; Samuel Fogg, Catalogue 12, *Medieval Manuscripts, 1989*, item 14 (with four colour plates); and K. L. Scott, *Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles*, vi: *Later Gothic Manuscripts* (forthcoming, London: Harvey Millar and Oxford University Press), no. 56. I am grateful to Dr Scott for these latter references. The comparative lack of patronage amongst royal women during the later medieval period, however, remains something of a puzzle, although the evidence for their commitment may simply not have survived: see the description of Oxford, Jesus College MS 124, a prayer roll commissioned by Margaret of Anjou, in J. J. G. Alexander, 'William Abell, "lymnour" and 15th Century English Illumination', in A. Rosenauer and G. Weber (eds.), *Kunsthistorische Forschungen: Otto Pächt zu seinem 70. Geburtstag* (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 1972), pp. 166–72; and A. R. Myers, 'The Household of Queen Elizabeth Woodville, 1466–67', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 50 (1967–8), 207–35, 443–81, p. 481 for the record of a payment of ten pounds made for a book for Edward IV's queen.
  - 40 See M. Deanesly, 'Vernacular Books in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries', *MLR* 15 (1920), 349–58. Among the more unusual texts it is worth noting the apparent popularity of apocalypses amongst women: aside from Eleanor de Quincy's ownership of Lambeth 209 (see n. 98 below), Juliana de Leybourn, countess of Huntingdon (d. 1367) left Cambridge, Corpus Christi

- College MS 20, a Latin Apocalypse with a metrical paraphrase and commentary in Anglo-Norman, to the abbey of St Augustine's, Canterbury: see J. J. G. Alexander and Paul Binski (eds.), *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200–1400* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson for the Royal Academy of Arts, 1987), p. 201, no. 11 and M. R. James, *The Ancient Libraries of Canterbury and Dover* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), p. 210. Lady Isabella Fryskney was, in 1385, left 'the Book of Apocalypse which she has of mine' by Richard de Ravenser, archdeacon of Lincoln: Alfred Gibbons (ed.), *Early Lincoln Wills* (Lincoln: Williamson, 1888), p. 68. Alice Basset, Lady of Bytham, in 1412 bequeathed 'unum librum vocatum Apocolips' to Markby Abbey (Gibbons, *Early Lincoln Wills*, p. 110); and Cecily Welles (d. 1507) owned London, British Library MS Royal 15.D.11: D. Drew Egbert, 'The So-Called "Greenfield" *La Lumière as Lais and Apocalypse*', *Speculum* 11 (1936), 446–52.
- 41 See Jonathan Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1988) and S. S. Hussey, 'The Audience for the Middle English Mystics', in Sargent (ed.), *De cella in seculum*, pp. 109–22, on the early female audiences for Rolle and Hilton; and also on Rolle, S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson (ed.), *Richard Rolle: Verse and Prose*, EETS OS 298 (1988), Introduction. On the audience for Hilton in the fifteenth century see Michael G. Sargent, 'Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*: the London Manuscript Group Reconsidered', *Medium Aevum* 52 (1983), 189–216.
- 42 Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, p. 168; Schirmer, *John Lydgate*, pp. 190, 154–5, 94. For the texts see MacCracken, *Minor Poems*, 1, pp. 130–3; 173–92; 260–67.
- 43 Ralph Hanna III, 'Sir Thomas Berkeley and His Patronage', *Speculum* 64 (1989), 878–916, pp. 899–900.
- 44 On Margaret Beauchamp's Hours and the other Fitzwilliam book see Francis Wormald and Phyllis M. Giles, *Illuminated Manuscripts in the Fitzwilliam Museum* (Cambridge: Fitzwilliam Museum, 1966), no. 72, pp. 31–2 and bibliography cited there; and on her interest in Lydgate, Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, respectively pp. 291–2; 71; 167. The interest of female readers in Lydgate's *Life of Our Lady* may also be remarked at this point. Oxford, Bodleian Library Hatton MS 73 contains on f. 122r the *ex libris* of 'Dame Elizabeth Wyndesore' (d. 18 January 1531; she is probably to be identified as the elder sister and co-heir of Edward, second baron Mountjoy, and wife of Andrew Windsor of Stanwell, Keeper of the Great Wardrobe under Henry VIII: see *GEC: Complete Peerage*, XII, Part 2, London: St Catherine's Press, 1959, pp. 792–4). Hatton 73 also contains a note stating that it sometime 'was Quene margarete boke' (f. 121v). Oxford, Bodleian Library Ashmole MS 39 carries on its front and rear pastedowns the name of Anne Andrew, when she was married to Sir Thomas Bourchier (see further pp. 142–3 below); and according to J. Lauritis, R. A. Klinefelter and V. F. Gallagher (eds.), *A Critical Edition of John Lydgate's Life of Our Lady*, Duquesne Studies, Philological Ser. 2 (Pittsburgh, 1961), p. 23, Jane Fitzlewis signed her name in Durham University Library Cosin MS v.11.
- 45 Serjeantson (ed.), *Legendys of Hooly Wummen by Osbern Bokenham*, p. 289. See A. S. G. Edwards, 'The Transmission and Audience of Osbern Bokenham's *Legendys*

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- of *Hooley Wummen*', in A. J. Minnis (ed.), *Late-Medieval Texts and their Transmission: Essays in Honour of A. I. Doyle* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993), pp. 157–67.
- 46 See the Prologue, line 122.
- 47 See lines 5045–55, 5065–75, 10609–13. On the other women to whom he dedicated various of the *Legendys* – Katherine Denston, Isabel Hunt, Katherine Howard and Agatha Flegge – see Samuel Moore, 'Patrons of Letters in Norfolk and Suffolk, c. 1450', Part II, *PMLA* 28 (1913), 79–105.
- 48 On Oxford, Magdalen College MS 41, given by Elizabeth Vere to Barking in 1476/7, see A. I. Doyle, 'Books Connected with the Vere Family and Barking Abbey', *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society* 25 (1958), 222–43, p. 235. On the mixed life cf. Hilary M. Carey, 'Devout Literate Laypeople and the Pursuit of the Mixed Life in Late Medieval England', *Journal of Religious History* 14 (1987), 361–81.
- 49 J. J. Munro (ed.), *John Capgrave's Lives of St Augustine and St Gilbert of Sempringham, etc.*, EETS OS 140 (1910), p. 1.
- 50 See n. 1 above. Would that these books were further specified! Carey, 'Devout Literate Laypeople', p. 369, suggests that, given Alice West's decision to become a vowess, these books 'may well have been devotional in character', but the point is irresolvable.
- 51 Margaret Beaufort, for instance, 'Ful often . . . complayned that in her youthe she had not gyuen her to the vnderstondynge of latyn'; see John E. B. Mayor (ed.), *The English Works of John Fisher*, EETS ES 27 (1876), p. 292. But compare the example of Eleanor Hull, as described by Alexandra Barratt, 'Dame Eleanor Hull: a Fifteenth-Century Translator', in Roger Ellis (ed.), *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), pp. 87–101, and see also the remarks by Felicity Riddy in her essay in this volume, p. 111.
- 52 The association of Eleanor of Aquitaine with the Anglo-Norman *Tristan* of Thomas, for instance, can only be speculative: no presentation copy or dedication to her is extant.
- 53 Nun's Priest's Tale, lines 3211–13, in Larry D. Benson (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).
- 54 See, most recently, Juliet Vale, *Edward III and Chivalry: Chivalric Society and Its Context 1270–1350* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1982), pp. 49–50. On the Arthurian romance of *Escanor* by Girart d'Amiens, dedicated to Edward I's queen, Eleanor of Castile, see Elizabeth Salter, *English and International: Studies in the Literature, Art and Patronage of Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 96.
- 55 K. B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 236–7, n. 5; Gibbons, *Early Lincoln Wills*, pp. 117–18.
- 56 R. L. Storey, *Thomas Langley and the Bishopric of Durham 1406–1437* (London: SPCK, 1961), pp. 5, 169, 186, and *The Register of Thomas Langley Bishop of Durham 1406–1437*, 1, Surtees Society 164 (1949), p. xv; and see Surtees Society 170 (1955), pp. 159–64, for Hebbeden's will.
- 57 Gibbons, *Early Lincoln Wills*, pp. 91–2; McFarlane, *Nobility of Later Medieval*

- England*, p. 236, n. 5. Margaret's husband, Hugh Courtenay, had left her 'touz mes vestementz et livres' from his chapel in his will of 1375, and he left books (probably all of a devotional nature) to their three daughters. He left no books to their three sons. See F. C. Hingeston-Randolph (ed.), *The Register of Thomas de Brantyngham, Bishop of Exeter (AD 1370-1394)*, Part 1 (London: Pollard, 1901), p. 381.
- 58 H. D. L. Ward, *Catalogue of Romances in the British Museum*, 1 (London: the British Museum, 1883), pp. 358-9; Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, 'Richard III's Books: x. The Prose *Tristan*', *The Ricardian*, 9, no. 112 (1991), 23-37.
- 59 Nichols, *Royal Wills*, p. 254; *Wills and Inventories . . . of the Northern Counties of England*, 1, Surtees Society 2 (1835), pp. 63-5.
- 60 *Testamenta Eboracensia*, 1, 338-9, p. 339.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 11, 118-24, p. 123; Alesia was also left her 'magnum Primarium optimum'.
- 62 Warner and Gilson, *Catalogue of Royal Manuscripts*, 11, p. 140; Henri Omont, 'Les manuscrits français des rois d'Angleterre au château de Richmond', in *Etudes Romanes dédiées à Gaston Paris . . . par ses élèves français*, etc. (Paris: Bouillon, 1891), 1-13, p. 11, no. 103. For biographical details of Alyanor Hawte see Fleming, 'The Hautes and their "Circle"', pp. 90-1.
- 63 N. F. Blake (ed.), *Caxton's Own Prose* (London: André Deutsch, 1973), p. 57; and on Alice Chaucer, above, pp. 134-5.
- 64 The only books specified as being left to Margaret by her husband were those belonging to his chapel; see the transcription of his will in Ethel Seaton, *Sir Richard Roos* (London: Hart-Davis, 1961), 547-50, p. 549.
- 65 McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights*, p. 117; Nicholas Orme, *English Schools in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1973), p. 25.
- 66 Cambridge University Library MS Ff.3.11; see Meale, 'The Manuscripts and Early Audience of the Middle English Prose *Merlin*'. I am no longer convinced, however, that the annotations are in Elyanor Guldeford's hand, although they are probably contemporary, or near-contemporary.
- 67 See ff. 54r and 87r, pp. 90, 347 in E. A. Kock (ed.), *Henry Lovelich's Merlin*, Parts III and IV, EETS ES 28, 30 (1877, 1878).
- 68 See the facsimile: Richard Beadle and A. E. B. Owen (introd.), *The Findern Manuscript: Cambridge University Library MS Ff.1.6* (London: Scolar, 1978); and for the most recent account of the women whose names are found in the volume, Kate Harris, 'The Origins and Make-Up of Cambridge University Library MS Ff.1.6', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 8 (1983), 299-333. On the process of compilation see also Ralph Hanna III, 'The Production of Cambridge University Library MS Ff.1.6', *Studies in Bibliography* 40 (1987), 62-70, and John J. Thompson, 'Collecting Middle English Romances and Some Related Book-Production Activities in the Later Middle Ages', in Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows and Carol M. Meale (eds.), *Romance in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), 17-38, pp. 30-7.
- 69 Derek Pearsall (ed.), *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), pp. 58, 131-35; and for the suggestion that Digby 181 may have belonged to Thomasin Hopton, Richmond, *John Hopton*, p. 131, n. 108.
- 70 Derek Pearsall, 'Notes on the Manuscript of *Generydes*', *The Library*, 5th ser. 16



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- (1961), 205–10; Norman Davis (ed.), *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, 1976), I, p. 575. The name of a Syon nun, 'syster Anne Colvyll', appears in the miscellany Oxford, Bodleian Library Laud MS 416, which contains a copy of *The Siege of Thebes*.
- 71 Charles Henry Cooper, *Memoir of Margaret, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge: Deighton Bell, 1874), p. 132; Devizes Museum, Canon Jackson's Hungerford Family Collections, Personal, i, f. 114r. Walter Hungerford also left to Elizabeth Courtenay 'my psalter curiously covered with red baudekyn and with divers pictures before the Kalender, in which I was frequently used to read'.
  - 72 On Chaucer's primary audience see the recent work by Paul Strohm, 'Chaucer's Audience(s): Fictional, Implied, Intended, Actual' and Richard Firth Green, 'Women in Chaucer's Audience', in *Chaucer Review* 18 (1983), 137–45, 146–54; and Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), chapters 2 and 3.
  - 73 See M. B. Parkes and Elizabeth Salter (introd.), *Troilus and Criseyde, Geoffrey Chaucer: A Facsimile of Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 61* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1978), p. 23, for suggested identifications of the Anne Neville who owned this manuscript (she may have been the woman who commissioned Part II of New York Public Library Spencer 3); and on Harley 4912 see R. K. Root, *The Manuscripts of Chaucer's Troilus* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner; and Humphrey Milford, for the Chaucer Society, 1914), p. 31. Root suggests that Norres and Nevell may be the maiden and married names of the same woman.
  - 74 J. M. Manly and Edith Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*, 8 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), I, pp. 608, 612–13.
  - 75 Cooper, *Memoir of Margaret, Countess of Richmond*, p. 134.
  - 76 *Testamenta Eboracensia*, II, 13–15, p. 14; Kate Harris, 'Patrons, Buyers and Owners: the Evidence For Ownership, and the Role of Book Owners in Book Production and the Book Trade', in Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (eds.), *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375–1475* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 163–99, p. 170 and plate 16; Cooper, *Memoir of Margaret, Countess of Richmond*, p. 134. The name of 'Elizabeth Vernon', possibly in a fifteenth-century hand, occurs in the copy of the *Confessio* now British Library Additional MS 12043; see G. C. Macaulay (ed.), *The English Works of John Gower*, I, EETS ES 81 (1900), p. cliv. Other women's names in Gower manuscripts appear to date from the sixteenth century.
  - 77 Beadle and Owen, 'Contents of the Manuscript' in the facsimile, items 1–3, 13 and 26.
  - 78 *Testamenta Eboracensia*, I, 241–5, p. 243; Carol M. Meale, 'The Morgan Library copy of *Generides*', in Mills, Fellows and Meale (eds.), *Romance in Medieval England*, 89–104, p. 103, n. 61. Another reference concerning Anne Andrew may be added: in the will of Nicholas Talbot, made in 1501, the testator bequeaths to 'my lady Anne Sulyard of Wethyrden a Seynt Gregorius pyte of gold enameled and a lytyll boke that she gaue me': see Samuel Tymms (ed.), *Wills and Inventories from the Registers of the Commissary of Bury St Edmund's*, Camden Society 49 (1850), p. 88.
  - 79 *Testamenta Eboracensia*, I, 178–80, p. 179; F. W. Ives, *The Common Lawyers of*

- Pre-Reformation England – Thomas Kebell: A Case Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Appendix A, p. 427. Margaret Beaufort left to her son 'a greate volume of velom couered with blake veluet, which is the secunde volume of Froysart' (Cooper, *Memoir of the Margaret, Countess of Richmond*, p. 132): this is almost certainly a reference to his *Chroniques*. Mary Hungerford also came into possession of Oxford, Bodleian Library Digby MS 233, containing Trevisa's translation of Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* and Walton's of Vegetius' *De re militari*: see A. I. Doyle, 'English Books In and Out of Court', in V. J. Scattergood and J. W. Sherborne (eds.), *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Duckworth, 1983), p. 173. It would be worth pursuing the question of whether this was a Hungerford family book. Other instances of female ownership or patronage of 'historical' texts may be connected directly with the family interests of individual women; cf. Margaret Talbot's patronage of Lydgate's *Guy of Warwick*, above, pp. 137–8, and Kathleen Scott's support for the theory that Anne Neville (née Beauchamp) commissioned the Beauchamp Pageants (British Library Cotton MS Julius E.IV, article 6), in *The Caxton Master and His Patrons*, Cambridge Bibliographical Society Monograph 8 (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 61–5.
- 80 See the essays by Julia Boffey and Felicity Riddy in this volume, pp. 108, 110, 161.
- 81 On the manuscript see Sandra Hindman, 'The Composition of the Manuscript of Christine de Pizan's Collected Works in the British Library: a Reassessment', *British Library Journal* 9 (1983), 93–123; and for Jaquette's signature, Lotte Hellenga, *Caxton in Focus: The Beginning of Printing in England* (London: British Library, 1982), p. 85, fig. 43.
- 82 Curt F. Bühler (ed.), *Stephen Scrope: The Epistle of Othea*, EETS OS 264 (1970), pp. xix–xx. In the light of the evidence gathered together in this essay Bühler's comment on the candidatures of Anne Beauchamp and Anne Neville for the position of the 'hye princesse', that 'neither . . . was particularly noted as a patron of the arts' (p. xx), may be disputed. If Anne Stafford's copy of the 'pistilles' was an English translation, it has to be admitted that she may not have known that the original author was a woman.
- 83 Cf. n. 10 above.
- 84 See the introduction to this volume, pp. 1–2.
- 85 *North Country Wills . . . 1383–1558*, Surtees Society 116 (1908), pp. 48–9; and see the discussion by Felicity Riddy, above, p. 108.
- 86 On the poverty of Yorkshire nunneries see Janet E. Burton, *The Yorkshire Nunneries in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, Borthwick Papers 56 (University of York: Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, 1979), pp. 11–17; and cf. Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries c. 1275 to 1535* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922) and Sally Thompson, *Women Religious: The Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), *passim*.
- 87 Elizabeth Salter, 'The Manuscripts of Nicholas Love's *Myrrour of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ* and Related Texts', in A. S. G. Edwards and Derek Pearsall (eds.), *Middle English Prose: Essays on Bibliographical Problems* (New York and London:

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- Garland, 1981), 115–27, p. 120; J. A. Herbert (ed.), *The French Text of the Ancrene Riwe*, EETS OS 219 (1944), pp. xii–xiii.
- 88 J. Raine (ed.), *Testamenta Eboracensia*, v, Surtees Society 79 (1884), pp. 50–2; and on the identity of this ‘lady Shyrley’ as Anne Vernon, wife of Sir Ralph Shirley, Michael K. Jones and Malcolm G. Underwood, *The King’s Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 160.
- 89 P. J. Croft, *Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond, Elizabeth of York and Wynkyn de Worde* (London: Quaritch, 1958) and *Fifty-Five Books Printed Before 1525 . . . An Exhibition from the Collection of Paul Mellon* (New York: Grolier Club, 1968), pp. 20–1, and plate; *The Hastings Hours*, with preface and commentary by D. H. Turner (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983), p. 107. It seems most likely that the Queen Elizabeth referred to by Katherine Hastings is Elizabeth of York, rather than her mother, Elizabeth Wydeville.
- 90 The manuscript was made for Elizabeth and Cecily’s brother, Edward, Prince of Wales; for descriptions of the manuscript and text see *A Catalogue of Illuminated and Other Manuscripts* (London: Quaritch, 1931), pp. 95–7, and C. A. J. Armstrong, ‘A Present for a Prince: The Survival of a Newsletter, Constantinople, 1481’, *The Times*, 23 May 1936, p. 15. Lower down on the same page as the name of ‘Jane Grey’ appears an inscription in drypoint which may read ‘alyanor’. The names of Elizabeth and Cecily of York occur in both ink and drypoint on the front flyleaves of the book, and that of ‘elysabeth’ alone on a rear flyleaf, in drypoint. That ‘Jane Grey’ was a contemporary of Elizabeth Wydeville and her daughters, and is not to be identified as the Lady Jane Grey who assumed the throne in the sixteenth century, is confirmed by the style of these signatures: the latter Jane wrote in a neat humanistic hand.
- 91 Anne Neville was also the dedicatee of *The Nightingale*, a poem once attributed to Lydgate, the opening stanza of which runs:

Go, lityll quayere, and swyft thy prynses dresse,  
 Offringe thyselfe wyth humble reuerence  
 Vn-to the ryght hyghe and myghty pryncesse,  
 The Duches of Bokyngham, and of hur excellence  
 Besechinge hyre, that, of hure pacyence  
 Sche wold the take, of hure noble grace  
 Amonge hyre bokys for the asygne a place . . .

See Otto Glauning (ed.), *Lydgate’s Minor Poems: The Two Nightingale Poems*, EETS ES 80 (1900), p. 2.

- 92 For the Hoccleve manuscript, Durham University Library Cosin MS v.III.9, see F. J. Furnivall and I. Gollancz (eds.), *Hoccleve’s Works: The Minor Poems*, EETS ES 61, 73 (1892, 1925), rev. in one vol. by Jerome Mitchell and A. I. Doyle (1970); the dedication to Joan is printed on p. 242. On Cambridge University Library Additional 3042 see Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries*, p. 91; and on Joan and Margery, Meech and Allen (eds.), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, p. 133.
- 93 Cf. n. 1 above. Another relationship between women which should be noted in

- this context is that between Beatrice Milreth and her sister, Agnes Burgh – the former left the majority of her books to Agnes; see above, p. 132. Given the range of relationships between women which were apparently important, the exclusive emphasis placed on the mother–daughter connection by Susan Groag Bell, ‘Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture’, *Signs* 7 (1982), 742–68, repr. in Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (eds.), *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1988), pp. 149–87, is misleading.
- 94 See V. J. Scattergood (ed.), *The Works of Sir John Clanvowe* (Cambridge and Ipswich: Brewer, 1975); McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights*, esp. pp. 199–206, 230–2.
- 95 Furnivall (ed.), *Fifty Earliest English Wills*, pp. 49–51.
- 96 McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights*, p. 185, notes that the widow of another knight associated with this group, Sir Philip de la Vache, left ‘a book of English cleped “Pore Caytife”’, but the other books he itemises can be identified as those bequeathed by Lady Peryne Clanvowe, so his reference here is clearly confused. It may be worth remarking in this connection that *Pore Caitif* is a text which is amenable to Lollard rewriting: see Sr M. Teresa Brady, ‘Lollard Interpolations and Omissions in Manuscripts of *The Pore Caitif*’, in Sargent (ed.), *De cella in seculum*, pp. 183–203.
- 97 The increasing prevalence in the later Middle Ages of images of the Virgin reading is noted by Bell, ‘Medieval Women Book Owners’, whereas Michael Clanchy laid particular stress on the increase in the number of depictions of St Anne teaching the Virgin to read in his paper, ‘Learning to Read in the Middle Ages’, delivered as the annual Tucker-Cruse Lecture at the University of Bristol, March 1990. Erler and Kowaleski, commenting on Bell’s essay in their introduction to *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, make the point that the frequency with which such images were reproduced may in fact reflect an opposite trend to that emphasised by Bell: ‘as the numbers of women book owners increased in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, so too did the numbers of such Marian images’ (p. 7).
- 98 Cf. the discussion of the Lambeth Apocalypse, London, Lambeth Palace Library MS 209 (made for Eleanor de Quincy, countess of Winchester, c. 1265), by Nigel Morgan, *A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles*, iv, *Early Gothic Manuscripts, 1, 1190–1250* (London: Harvey Millar and Oxford University Press, 1982), no. 126, pp. 101–5. See also the facsimile, with critical study by Nigel Morgan, *The Lambeth Apocalypse* (London: Harvey Millar, 1991).

## Women authors and women's literacy in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England\*

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Compilers of biographical dictionaries of early English women authors, and of anthologies of their writings, have a hard and repetitious time in their coverage of the late Middle Ages. There seems little to say, and most of it has been said already. The temptation to swell the female canon by perpetrating literary hoaxes, and to resurrect supposedly lost *œuvres*; has been powerful; the acclaim enjoyed by the French poems attributed to the mythical Clothilde de Surville, published by a cunning bibliophile in the eighteenth century and reprinted until as recently as the 1950s, stands as an example.<sup>1</sup> But more necessary than the traditional literary-historical task of amalgamating the scattered textual remains left by female authors is some investigation of the different senses in which 'writing women' might have existed in the period, especially in relation to texts such as lyrics, often narrated in the female voice, whose authorship is so notoriously hard to identify. This essay accordingly focuses on some questions concerning this area of definition, and explores the possibility of isolating distinctive features of female literary composition in the centuries which immediately preceded the profound cultural changes brought about by the shift from manuscript to print culture. What kinds and standards of literacy did medieval women possess? By what methods were the compositions of women 'authors' recorded and disseminated, in an age when scribal skills were not automatically concomitant with authorial ones? How is it possible to locate women's writing in a period characterised by anonymity? Only by uncovering exactly what constituted women's writing can we begin to answer the most pressing questions of feminist criticism: 'what does writing as a woman mean, and to what extent does it involve a new theory and a new practice?'<sup>2</sup>

To begin with the question of available role models for women writing in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries reminds us at the outset of the very small number of relevant names from earlier periods. In one account the

mere placing of the information, at the end of a hierarchical sequence of chapters which sets women after villeins, indicates how little positive detail we possess.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, however, those few twelfth- and thirteenth-century English women who identified themselves as authors came from privileged court or convent backgrounds and enjoyed access to education and scholarly circles in which comprehensive literacy and considerable learning could have been acquired. Marie de France tells us that she knew French, Latin and English.<sup>4</sup> Her surviving literary works – *Lais*, *Fables* and *L'Espurgatoire Seint Patrice* – are of course all in French, but this apparent concentration on a single vernacular may perhaps be misleading. If she is to be identified with the Marie who was abbess of Shaftesbury in 1181, as has been suggested, then her linguistic and compositional skills were presumably also put to use in scholarly and administrative capacities as well as creative ones (perhaps manifesting themselves in forms which were physically ephemeral or whose connection with Marie went unrecorded), but in the face of so little surviving documentation we can reconstruct few of the processes involved in her writing.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, Marie's demonstrable involvement in both religious and secular works remains unusual. The surviving writings of other women who can more certainly be associated with religious milieux are notably pious. One Clemence, a nun of Barking, names herself as the author of a twelfth-century life of St Catherine, and may also have been responsible for a life of Edward the Confessor, produced between 1163 and 1189; a nun from Chatteris composed a life of St Audrey, and Beatrice of Kent, abbess of Lacock, is credited with a life of her predecessor Countess Ela of Salisbury.<sup>6</sup>

We have no indication, of course, that any of these texts were particularly influential or widely known in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, or that the fact of their female authorship received any attention. If anything, it is tempting to suspect the reverse. The fourteenth-century English versions of Marie de France's *Lais* of *Le Fresne* and *Launfal* (the second in two redactions – *Sir Landevale* and Thomas Chestre's later *Sir Launfal*)<sup>7</sup> – do not mention her existence or involvement in their genesis. One or two role models for women authors can however be glimpsed behind other translations which are known to have circulated in reasonable numbers. Different English versions of the compendious gynaecological treatise attributed to an obscure female 'Trotula' from eleventh-century Salerno are extant, and her existence was evidently credited, albeit rather vaguely. As John Benton notes, 'In the Middle Ages a female medical author seemed a believable figure, though one best imagined in an exotic locale.'<sup>8</sup>

Christine de Pizan apparently enjoyed some more public English reputation, perhaps partly due to her son's residence in England in the early

part of the reign of Henry IV, and to her own correspondence with John Montacute, earl of Salisbury.<sup>9</sup> In view of Christine's efforts on behalf of her sex, it is ironic that all the surviving English versions of her works were as far as is known produced by men.<sup>10</sup> Hoccleve, for whatever reason, saw fit to translate Christine's *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours*, one of the earliest documents in the literary quarrel over *Le Roman de la rose*; and the *Epistre d'Othéa* appeared in no less than three English versions over the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.<sup>11</sup> Two translations of the *Corps de polycye* survive, and one of the *Cité des dames*.<sup>12</sup> Caxton, who at the command of Henry VII translated and printed the *Faits d'armes et de chevalerie*, and later produced an edition of Anthony Woodville's translation of the *Proverbes moraux*, names Christine in the epilogues he supplied to both works.<sup>13</sup> It is surely also significant that the sumptuous British Library Harley MS 4431, a collection of Christine's works which contains examples of her own script and many illustrations of the author at work, should have been in English hands for much of the fifteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

Translations of continental devotional texts must also have reminded English audiences of the existence of female authors, and indeed some were made available at the request of women, with groups like the Bridgettine nuns of Syon playing an important role.<sup>15</sup> The *Revelations* of their own St Bridget of Sweden (translated from the vernacular into Latin by Bridget's confessors) appeared in at least seven different English versions, and a translation of some of the writings of Mechtild of Hackeborn may have been prepared for them.<sup>16</sup> The *Dialogues* of St Catherine of Siena (dictated to amanuenses before circulating in various languages) were made available to them in the form of the early sixteenth-century *Orchard of Syon*.<sup>17</sup> In keeping with Syon's brand of female spirituality, although in less specifically documented circulation, English versions of the *Meditations* of Elizabeth [? of Schönau] and of Margarete Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* constituted further examples of women's compositions.<sup>18</sup>

The role of intermediate male spiritual advisers in both translating and disseminating these writings was crucial, and it is difficult to assess the amount of first-hand contact with any of the texts which English women readers, and would-be writers, can have enjoyed. Similar and more disturbing imponderables arise when we try to reconstruct the circumstances in which identifiable women authors actually composed the texts with which they are associated. Christine de Pizan may have been pictured at a desk, 'writing' her works in what to us seems a familiar manner, but her practice (or her artist's depiction of it) is not necessarily representative.<sup>19</sup> Were Marie de France, Clemence of Barking, and other females whose lives and habits are less fully documented than those of Christine 'writing

women' in the sense in which we would now understand the term, or were they 'authors' in some perhaps more remote sense? It has been well observed by Michael Clanchy, and by Bella Millett in this volume, that modern preconceptions about literacy may lead us into false assumptions about earlier periods, and we do well to remember that our notions of what constitutes 'authorship' may similarly need to be revised in a medieval context.<sup>20</sup> We talk about 'texts' and 'writings' and 'literature', in terms which all imply the embodiment of material in the form of written letters, but in many cases (most obviously those works which have not survived in autograph copies) we lack certain knowledge that the 'authors' responsible for the compositions ever envisaged them in this way.

The texts connected with Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe are pertinent here. Selections from both feature regularly in modern anthologies of women's writing from the Middle Ages, often in ways which iron out and conceal the significantly different circumstances in which the works were conceived. Two of the most recent editors of the *Revelation* of Julian of Norwich argue for her advanced and comprehensive literacy.<sup>21</sup> They suggest that she knew Latin and was acquainted with the Vulgate and the works of the Church Fathers at first hand, and conclude that her knowledge of the techniques of rhetoric proves her to have been an experienced author, who probably formulated and wrote out her own account of her visionary experiences. Although we might feel it equally plausible that Julian's familiarity with rhetorical practice should have been acquired as a listener, there remains insufficient detail in the *Revelation* or its manuscripts to sway the argument for her orthographic capabilities either way. None of the surviving copies of the so-called short or long texts is an autograph: the short text survives in one fifteenth-century version which may have been produced in a monastic scriptorium, and the long text (apart from a series of extracts made c. 1500) in a group of much later copies.<sup>22</sup> The nature of Julian's writings is such as to indicate long meditation on her experiences, and careful consideration of the manner most appropriate to their recording and publication. Although she apologises for her 'vnlettyrde' and 'leued' state, it seems not improbable that these conventional gestures concealed an ability to 'compose' and 'write', in the manner of Christine de Pizan, in circumstances which we can reconstruct without too much difficulty.<sup>23</sup>

The informative prefatory material supplied to Margery Kempe's *Boke* by its successive scribes sketches a situation much more remote from modern experience.<sup>24</sup> The one extant manuscript (discovered only in 1934) was produced by a scribe who names himself as Salthows. He in turn copied, directly or at some remove, from a priest's tidied version of the



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recollections which Margery had previously dictated to an amanuensis. The priest has been termed 'no less than Margery . . . the author of *The Boke*'.<sup>25</sup> He describes how Margery's experiences and behaviour convinced 'worthy & worshepful clerkys' of her acquaintance that she was inspired by some divine grace, and persuaded them 'pat sche schuld don hem wryten & makyn a booke of hyr felyngys & hir reuelacyons. Sum proferyd hir to wrytyn hyr felyngys wyth her owen handys, & sche wold not consentyn in no wey, for sche was comawndyd in hir sowle pat sche schuld not wrytyn so soone'.<sup>26</sup> Some twenty years after her first intimations of spiritual vision, Margery received divine licence to publish. She was unable to find an amanuensis until a certain mysterious 'man dwellyng in Dewchlonde which was an Englyschman in hys byrth' (perhaps to be identified as her own son) volunteered his services. The scribe visited England with his family and stayed with Margery until his task was accomplished:

Than was þer a prest which þis creatur had gret affecyon to, & so sche comownd wyth hym of þis mater & browt hym þe boke to reden. Þe booke was so euel wretyn þat he coud lytyl skyl þeron, for it was neipyr good Englysch ne Dewch, ne þe lettyr was not schapyn ne formyd as oþer letters ben. Þerfor þe prest leued fully þer schuld neuyr man redyn it, but it wer special grace. Neuyr-þe-lesse, he behyte hir þat if he coud redyn it he wolde copyn it owt & wrytyn it betyr wyth good wyll.<sup>27</sup>

Margery's reputation was such that the priest dared not communicate with her frequently, and his project was forgotten; the difficulty of transliterating was so great that neither extra light nor a mended pen nor spectacles could help. He advised Margery to visit another man, an acquaintance who knew the first Anglo-German amanuensis and could read his writing. He in turn tried his hardest, handsomely paid by Margery, but wrote only one leaf, 'þe boke was so euel sett & so vnresonably wretyn'. The priest tried once more, and miraculously inspired by divine grace found the work easier; Margery explained obscurities as and when he encountered them, and he was able to complete the task.<sup>28</sup>

I quote from this account at length because it illustrates in a particularly lively way the easy acceptance, on the part of Margery's acquaintances, of her own inability to make a physical record of her experiences. No one, over the course of the twenty years during which she awaited God's commandment to publish her visions, or during the course of the four or five years during which the priest struggled with the first scribe's handwriting, seems to have suggested the practical solution that she should learn to write. The priest was well aware of the formal and stylistic constraints brought about by the circumstances of dictation, and warns readers that 'Thys boke is not wretyn in ordyr, euery thyng aftyr oþer as it

wer don, but lych as þe mater cam to þe creatur in mend whan it schuld be wretyn.<sup>29</sup> A similar complacency seems to have operated in connection with Margery's inability to read. She understands the power of writing, owning a ring with the Latin inscription 'Thesus est amor meus', and dreaming of seeing her name inscribed in 'an howge boke . . . þe Boke of Lyfe', and she learnt by heart the *Veni creator*, 'wyth alle þe versys longyng perto',<sup>30</sup> yet when she complains of her illiteracy and God sends a priest to her aid, she is happy to accept his services as a reader over a period of seven or eight years rather than taking instruction in reading from him. The works of Hilton and St Bridget and *Stimulus amoris* and *Incendium amoris*, which she knew, must have been read and explained to her over a number of years.<sup>31</sup>

Margery was able to 'compose', in terms of recalling, organising and commenting upon her experiences, but the business of recording the resulting material for an audience of any size, and of giving it any posterity, depended entirely upon her priest's mastery of the written word. The spectacular feats of memory described by Margaret Aston in connection with the dissemination by females of lengthy Lollard works give pause for thought about compositions which may have been lost to us because of their uniquely oral circulation.<sup>32</sup> Like Margery, however, some others were able to transmit their 'compositions' through intermediaries. Visions of purgatory glimpsed in 1422 by a recluse named Margaret were communicated to a priest who wrote them down as 'a Reuelacyone schewed to ane holy womane now one late tyme', and were later copied by the scribe Robert Thornton into one of his collections (now Lincoln Cathedral MS 91). They begin:

Dere brethir and systurs & all oþer trew cristyn ffrendis þat redis this trectyce lystenyng and heris howe a womane was trauelde in hir slep & with a speryte of purgatorye and how þat scho made hir compleynte to hir gastely ffadir and said on this wyse . . .<sup>33</sup>

Whom would we describe as the author of this piece? Hardly a 'writing woman', yet it seems unfair to attribute it wholly to the 'gastely ffadir' who first recorded it in written form. We seem in need of a different vocabulary – free from lettered associations – to enable us to describe this unfamiliar set of activities and products.

Conflicting assessments of the general nature and standards of female literacy in this period complicate still further our sense of how women may have 'composed'. Eileen Power's conclusions about the very limited literacy of nuns have proved widely influential.<sup>34</sup> More recent surveys of book ownership and bequests, however, indicate at least that many women

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owned books, whether or not they could read them, while records of women active in the metropolitan book trade in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries corroborate Sylvia Thrupp's belief in the comparatively advanced literacy of the wives of London merchants.<sup>35</sup> The ability to read did not, of course, automatically confer writing skills, and the advice about these accomplishments which Caxton translated from Geoffrey de la Tour-Landry's book for his daughters nicely captures the insouciance of an age in which dictation to a scribe or household clerk could solve most problems:

And by cause somme folke sayen that they wold not that theyr wyues ne also theyr doughters wyst ony thyng of clergie ne of wrytyng . . . as for wrytyng, it is no force yf a woman can nought of it but as for redyng I saye that good and prouffitable is to al wymen. For a woman that can rede may better knowe the peryls of the sowle and her sauement than she that can nougt of it, for it hath be preued.<sup>36</sup>

In this area, though, it seems again that surviving evidence may mislead. In introducing the first volume of his edition of *The Paston Letters* Norman Davis signalled that 'the women of this family . . . were not, or not completely, literate', and cited Margery Brews's clumsy additions and signatures to the letters written for her by household clerks.<sup>37</sup> But the second volume includes several autograph letters, and letters with autograph signatures, sent by female members of the family or their acquaintances, comparable to autograph letters from women in the Cely, Stonor and Plumpton families.<sup>38</sup> Practice clearly varied (depending perhaps on the availability or handiness of labour): even in the sixteenth century, with its noted female scholars and scribes, Honor Lady Lisle dictated her letters.<sup>39</sup> The methods by which material to be copied was transmitted to scribes can now only be guessed at: oral dictation? rough notes on paper or on wax tablets? Information about this might help to reconstruct the processes of composition which generated a valentine poem sent by Margery Brews to John Paston III: 'I beseche zowe þat this bill be not seyn of non erthely creature safe only zour-selfe', begs the fully literate Margery – yet she still employed a clerk to copy the intimate communication.<sup>40</sup> Such conclusions as we can draw from women's involvement in letter-writing, like the evidence available in fictional sources,<sup>41</sup> indicate that orthographical accomplishment among women was more widespread than used to be supposed, but that it was by no means a necessary prerequisite for an act of composition.

Internal evidence, as well as the testimony of scribes and other independent witnesses, confirms the relationship between particular women and particular texts in most of the cases I have discussed so far. The authors themselves, or their spokesmen, furnish details of name, sex, status

and milieu which enable us to locate female involvement, whatever its nature, in the genesis of certain works. But the task of locating women's writing becomes far harder in the case of anonymous works in which no such helpful factual material is supplied. Orthographic or linguistic criteria here are of little use: even when evidence permits hypotheses about the distance between the original author and the scribe of one particular copy of a work, no attempt can be made to deduce the genders of those concerned in the chain of composition and dissemination. And, arguable though the case may be, stylistic or thematic patterns are hardly reliable guides to the sex of an author.<sup>42</sup> Scholarly reactions to the range of anonymous texts which feature women narrators furnish acute and sometimes comic demonstrations of the pitfalls which await the eager resuscitator of lost female reputations.

Instructions for women proffered by wives and mothers, for example, sound reasonable enough candidates to swell the range of women's writings in this period. Both *The Good Wife Taught her Daughter* and *The Good Wife Wold a Pilgrimage* are couched in the form of maternal instruction: the good advice concerns the need for regular church-going and observance of the sacraments; behaviour towards family and suitors; domestic efficiency. The female narrator of *The Thewis of Gud Women* points out in more generalised terms the characteristic vices and virtues of her sex.<sup>43</sup> None of the three works is distinguished by specific reference to individual women destinataires, however (unlike the fatherly advice of Geoffrey de la Tour-Landry in the otherwise somewhat analogous *Book of the Knight of the Tower*),<sup>44</sup> and none of the surviving manuscripts provides information about female authorship or even of early female readership. The distinct similarities between *The Good Wife Taught her Daughter* and several parallel male-oriented instructions from fathers to sons complicate the issue by suggesting a kind of androgynous inspiration.<sup>45</sup> It seems highly likely that dramatic appropriateness rather than actual women authors may have dictated the appearance of female narrators in these instances.

The instruction contained in the hunting poem *Tristram* is of a more specialised nature, and it is hard to imagine why a female narrator should have seemed appropriate to dispense it.<sup>46</sup> The simple truth may be that its author was a woman, addressing sons or charges. The *Ménagier de Paris* included advice on hunting and hawking in the instructions he compiled for his young wife, and skill in such pursuits was clearly not outside the realm of female competence.<sup>47</sup> But the automatic identification of the narrator of *Tristram* with the dame Julyans Barnes who is named in the colophon to the poem in early printed editions of *The Boke of St Albans* (RSTC 3308 etc.) is more problematical, and the biographical speculation

which has linked this name variously, and probably spuriously, with a daughter of Sir James Berners of Essex, and a prioress of Sopwell, less trustworthy still.<sup>48</sup> The first edition of the *Boke* came from the press of the Schoolmaster printer of St Albans in 1486, and was composed of sections on hawking, hunting, coat-armour and the blazoning of arms. Both the hawking and hunting sections conclude with short snippets of advice, sometimes in verse, to do with the courteous and gentlemanly behaviour expected of practitioners of these arts, and Wynkyn de Worde, reprinting the *Boke* in 1496, made further attractive additions, supplying a *Treatise on Fishing* and some more improving advice.<sup>49</sup> 'Julyans Barnes' has been connected with all the additional material, despite the fact that the only evidence for her involvement in any part of the contents of the *Boke* is the colophon at the end of the *Tristram* poem which reads in the printed editions, 'Explicit Julyans Barnes in her boke of huntyng'. Whether the figure named was actually the author, or merely the owner of a manuscript from which the material was at some stage taken, cannot of course be fathomed.

Whatever her relationship to 'Julyans Barnes', the narrator of the *Tristram* poem, like the different good wives who purvey advice in verse, may conceivably write in her own character. There is no reason to suppose that women did not or could not have access to the kinds of information which these works offer; no certain indication that the authors were not mothers or huntswomen. Texts of a less immediately practical kind, in which the narrators' roles are imagined creations which could never be played out in life, pose rather different problems, and lead to unplumbed areas of literary fashion and precedent. Energetic editorial resurrection of female authors for some of these demonstrates how susceptible the texts are to historical fluctuations in interpretive sensibility. Skeat's grounds for concluding that *The Nut-Brown Maid* (a dialogue between a man and a maiden) was 'almost certainly written by a woman' were quite baldly that 'it would be simply absurd to suppose that a fifteenth-century male poet would give himself out to be a woman; for he would only have been laughed at'.<sup>50</sup> Modern critical understanding views the adoption of literary *personae* in a very different way.

The histories of a verse *Lamentation of Mary Magdalen*, and of *The Flower and the Leaf* and *The Assembly of Ladies*, which Skeat also attributed to female hands, are instructive. No manuscript copy of the first is extant, but linguistic evidence points to a date of composition some time in the later fifteenth century.<sup>51</sup> It survives in an early printed quarto, from the press of Wynkyn de Worde (c. 1520, RSTC 17568), and in several later collected editions of Chaucer's works, beginning with Pynson's 1526 *Book of Fame*

(RSTC 5068). It is a substantial piece which explores the Magdalen's reactions to the disappearance of Christ's body from the tomb; entirely conventionally, her dismayed devotion is expressed in language and images which recall the modes of secular love poetry (there are echoes of *Troilus and Criseyde*, for example). Early editors mistakenly but understandably attributed the work to Chaucer, thinking it to be the translation of *Origenes upon the Magdalene* which is mentioned in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*.<sup>52</sup> Subsequent more strenuous linguistic study has excluded the work from the Chaucer canon, but left it available for other claims. For Skeat, it was a 'lugubrious piece' and probably 'the wail of a nun'.<sup>53</sup> Its most recent editor singled out among its special features 'the subtle phases of a nature striving to luxuriate in its own capacity for emotion, and satisfy through imagination its own craving for excitement . . . the prevalence of strong personal feeling, restricted within narrow range . . .', and continued 'It has been said that it is characteristic of women to give general statements a personal application, and this is true, not merely of the intellectual, but of the emotional side of their nature, as is shown in the above poem . . .'.<sup>54</sup> What of the Latin homily, incontestably the work of a man, on which the work is loosely based? What of Chaucer's own related, but lost, translation? Women were certainly much involved in the circulation of stories concerning female characters from the scriptures, but it would surely be a gross over-simplification to assume that they actually composed all the associated texts.

The scholarly history of *The Flower and the Leaf* and *The Assembly of Ladies*, as Alexandra Barratt has shown, reveals similar networks of misapprehension concerning female narrators, this time of secular poems.<sup>55</sup> Both are unusual in purporting to recount women's experiences (in *The Flower and the Leaf* an outdoor courtly party; in *The Assembly of Ladies* a dream in which petitioning women recount their grievances), but in neither poem is the female narrator's presence particularly obtrusive, and the texts have a wide appeal as semi-allegorical explorations of delicate courtly social problems and as homages to Chaucer. Because details of dress are copiously supplied, however (partly in order to distinguish between the allegiances of the different courtly figures involved), female authorship has been automatically assumed – most publicly by Skeat again, who attributed both to Margaret Neville.<sup>56</sup> While nothing in the early copies can conclusively disprove such an understanding, it seems more fruitful to view the poems in their generic context, as pseudo-Chaucerian love visions in which discussion of the conflicting claims of chastity and idle pleasure comes plausibly and appropriately from women's mouths, and in which the female perspective may have been devised as an attractive novelty or

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variation on a theme, even a means by which acquaintance with Chaucer's own experiments in *Anelida and Arcite* or *The Squire's Tale* could be demonstrated. In just such a way the precedent of Chaucer's use of the *Heroides* may lie behind the Ovidian *Lay of Sorrow*, spoken by a woman, which is gathered into one late fifteenth-century manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library Arch. Selden MS B.24) alongside *The Legend of Good Women* and *The Complaint of Venus*.<sup>57</sup>

Similar factors of literary precedent or dramatic appropriateness obscure the extent of female involvement in the composition of lyrics, a genre in which a sub-category of 'women's songs' is often isolated, in both English and continental vernaculars, and yet in which the irredeemable anonymity of texts is most pervasive.<sup>58</sup> Speculation seems fruitless in the case of anonymous political or religious poems in which words are put into the mouths of recognisable female figures (as in *The Lament for the Duchess of Gloucester*, or the many poems spoken by the Virgin):<sup>59</sup> anyone might have written them. Particular traditions of lyric writing, in which for instance betrayed maidens lament their seduction by Jolly Jankyn or Sweet Sir John (or their continental counterparts), were so widely and firmly established that the authorship of individual poems is again irrecoverably concealed.<sup>60</sup> The hint of anti-feminism which sometimes underlies such laments surfaces more crudely elsewhere in women's songs, and those lyrics in which wantons lust after serving men, or in which gossips and ale-wives recount gross jokes, were surely designed as hearty masculine entertainment rather than written by women to present the female point of view.<sup>61</sup> England seems to have had nothing to rival the songs of continental women troubadours,<sup>62</sup> and even in the realm of non-satirical lyrics in women's voices the facts at any rate remind us that amongst the few identifiable authors are several men. John Shirley copied a *Gentlewoman's Lament* into a manuscript which is now Cambridge, Trinity College R.3.20, noting that it was 'sayde by a gentilwomman whiche loued a man of gret estate', but supplying the running title 'A wommans compleynte made by Lidegate'.<sup>63</sup> Humfrey Newton, a Cheshire squire whose commonplace book (Oxford, Bodleian Library Lat. misc. MS c. 66) contains what are almost certainly holograph copies of his own poems, wrote a love epistle as from a mistress to her lover.<sup>64</sup> A poem like this might be an exercise in novelty written to match a male perspective, like the carol in Cambridge University Library Additional MS 5943 which is copied in alternative 'his' and 'hers' versions, or like the female halves of the several pairs of love epistles which have survived;<sup>65</sup> the gender of their authors need not automatically match those of their narrative voices.

A closer look at one specific collection of lyrics in the Findern

Manuscript (Cambridge University Library Ff.1.6), whose feminist interest and concentration on women's songs are often canvassed, clarifies some of the points I have tried to raise so far.<sup>66</sup> The manuscript includes contributions by at least thirty-five scribes, and it was compiled over a number of years. Interspersed among its lengthier contents, which focus noticeably on those Chaucerian and pseudo-Chaucerian texts which deal with women and their role, are four love lyrics written from a female viewpoint.<sup>67</sup> The coincidental presence of several women's names written in different parts of the manuscript has prompted much speculation. R. H. Robbins's early study of the collection noted its distinctive courtly tone and attributed the copying to a collaboration between 'local women amateurs and professional scribes'. While signalling the status of many of the love lyrics as unique copies, and noting the linguistic evidence which links some of them with the Derbyshire area, Robbins hesitated over committing himself on the question of whether or not these are autographs. Subsequent studies have been less cautious, however, and the woman's view of courtly love apparent in the contents of the collection has persuaded some scholars that the lyrics were both composed and copied into the manuscript by women.<sup>68</sup>

Some clearing of the ground seems necessary here. For a start, of the four lyrics in which women 'speak', one (*What so men seyn*) has a sting in the tail which effectively castigates female 'newfangelness'. Another (*Welcome be ye*) seems to be rather a dialogue in which both sexes participate. None of the four 'female' lyrics appears to me to have been copied by the hands which have written women's names in the manuscript. Two (*What so men seyn* and *My woofull bert*) are copied by the same one scribe, whose hand appears nowhere else in the volume, but as one of the two is the lyric which slyly introduces the subject of women's inconstancy we can hardly make great claims for this scribe's personal interest in 'the woman's view of courtly love'. In fact, the involvement of female scribes in the copying of any part of the manuscript cannot be documented with certainty. In most cases, the hands of the names do not correspond with hands evident anywhere else in the volume. The only exception concerns the names of 'Elisabet Koton' and 'Elisabet fraunceys', which appear at the end of the romance *Sir Degrevaunt* in a hand which would seem to be that of the second of the two scribes who collaborated on copying the text. Do the names identify the two women as the two scribes, or were they rather written in deference to the commissioners or future owners of the copying? We cannot tell.

One further point worth making is that the lyrics are almost all later additions to the manuscript. The present state of the volume is best explained as the product of the amalgamation of stints of copying which were loosely connected, and the subsequent addition to the newly formed



book of sequences of lyrics and short items which were jotted on available blank leaves. Whether by design or accident, the manuscript became a *liber amicorum*, in which many hands added only one or two items. As one would expect in an autograph album, the fillers and additions are short and easily memorable pieces: love lyrics, more often than not, but perhaps through the kind of inertia by which each contributor followed the example of those who had gone before, rather than through any specific desire to voice gender-related concerns. The nature of the manuscript's contents, and the number of female names it contains, must suggest that women read it with interest (perhaps even that they organised its production), but the status of its lyrics as the compositions or the copy of 'writing women' must await further proof.

Part of the difficulty of assessing the evidence for female involvement in the copying or contents of the Findern manuscript arises from the general impossibility of deducing the gender of a scribe from the appearance of a hand. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that so many texts survive in copies made at some remove from the original act of composition. What are we to make of the information about authorship supplied by agents of textual transmission such as scribes? How helpful can it be in locating the writings of women? Some cases, in which the name specified and the nature of involvement claimed are vague and uncorroborated elsewhere, must remain mysterious: such is Shirley's attribution of a *Holy Salutation to the Virgin*, in Oxford, Bodleian Library Ashmole MS 59, to an anonymous ' anchoress of Maunssfeld'.<sup>69</sup> Elsewhere, rather more information may be supplied. The compiler of the *Ordinarium* for Barking Abbey, for example, writing at the command of the abbess Sibilla Felton between 1394 and 1419, reveals that the Easter dramatic offices for Barking (which he copied) had been revised by a previous abbess, Katherine of Sutton.<sup>70</sup> In the case of Eleanor Hull, there exists still further documentation, outside the information supplied by a later copyist of her work, to supply corroborative evidence. Her translations into English of a French commentary on the seven penitential psalms, a meditation on the seven days of the week, and some prayers, survive in a copy (Cambridge University Library MS Kk.1.6) in which the scribe notes 'Alyanore Hull drew out of French all this before written in this little book.' We can learn from her will, copied in her own hand, that Eleanor was a fully literate woman, owning and bequeathing books, whose practical involvement in the making of the translations and probable completion of an original written exemplar seems hardly to be questioned.<sup>71</sup>

A scribe's attribution of a love lyric in its unique surviving copy (Oxford, Bodleian Library Rawlinson MS c. 86) to a 'Quene Elyzabeth' is more perplexing.<sup>72</sup> Which Queen Elizabeth, first of all? The portion of the

manuscript in which the lyric occurs dates from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, and has demonstrable London connections and an evident Yorkist bias;<sup>73</sup> the scribe who wrote the note presumably referred to either Elizabeth Woodville or her daughter Elizabeth of York. On balance, it seems more likely that Henry VII's queen should have been credited with appropriate cause for rejoicing in her marriage, but such further testimony to her literary abilities as survives tends to obfuscate rather than clarify. A mortality lyric in which she speaks from beyond the grave tells us little; with reasonable authority it is elsewhere anyway attributed to Thomas More.<sup>74</sup> But significantly, in one version of the *Song of Lady Bessy*, a eulogistic account of Elizabeth's youth, written probably in the sixteenth century, her authorial and orthographic talents are singled out for comment.<sup>75</sup> Colluding with Lord Stanley in the composition of letters designed to raise support for Henry Tudor, Elizabeth is able to bypass the security risk of employing a scribe:

You shall not need none such to call,  
 Good father Stanley, hearken to me,  
 What my father, King Edward, that king royal,  
 Did for my sister, my Lady Wells, and me:  
 He sent for a scrivener to lusty London,  
 He was the best in that citty;  
 He taught us both to write and read full soon,  
 If it please you, full soon you shall see:  
 Lauded be God, I had such speed,  
 That I can write as well as he,  
 And also indite and full well read,  
 And that (Lord) soon shall you see,  
 Both English and alsoe French,  
 And also Spanish, if you had need . . .<sup>76</sup>

Some reputed association between Elizabeth and the skills of 'writing' and 'inditing' seems to have been operative, but whether it influenced or in fact derived from the attribution in Rawlinson MS c. 86 is harder to unravel. It seems quite possible that this 'writing woman' was actually a creation of fertile-minded scribes.

From the late fifteenth to the early sixteenth century is no great span of time, yet the cultural climates of the two periods are often very differently perceived. One distinguishing feature which is often remarked is the sudden appearance, after 1500, of women whose comprehensive literacy and published *œuvres* qualify them to rank as 'authors' in what has come to be our modern understanding of the term. Lady Margaret Beaufort's

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literary interests, for example, can be reconstructed in some properly representative way: her library, her letters, the works she patronised or agreed to receive, her scholarly attainments and her own writings can all be studied.<sup>77</sup> Her interests and capabilities seem to typify those of other women associated with the courts of Henry VII and Henry VIII in the early sixteenth century: Catherine of Aragon, who encouraged humanist learning, who was praised by Erasmus, and who was dedicatee of Vives' *De institutione foeminae christianae* translated by Richard Hyrd (RSTC 24836); Anne Boleyn, whose scholarship and interest in the intellectual climate of reform are signalled in many ways; Katherine Parr, who read and wrote Latin and other languages with fluency, and composed devotional works in the manner of Thomas a Kempis; Margaret More, who translated Erasmus's *Precatio dominica* into English (RSTC 10477).<sup>78</sup> The translations produced by these scholarly women in almost every case reflect their spiritual interests. They wrote in order that an audience knowing nothing but English should not be denied the spiritual edification available in certain Latin or French texts. The survival of their productions is no doubt partly due to the coincidence of their chronological association with the spread of printing, and with printers and publishers who were anxious to add to their lists reputable works by reputable figures.

In other areas of writing, though, the charting of women's involvement remains as arbitrary as during the fifteenth and earlier centuries. Only through the accidental survival of the so-called Devonshire manuscript (British Library Additional 17492) is it possible to glimpse the less scholarly literary activities of the ladies of Henry VIII's court. Here, in a collection very like the Findern manuscript (famous now for its inclusion of many poems by Wyatt, some of which have fuelled the imaginative reconstruction of his supposed affair with Anne Boleyn), it is fortunately possible to identify three of the hands as those of Mary Shelton, Mary Fitzroy and Margaret Douglas – all at some stage connected with the household of Anne Boleyn.<sup>79</sup> Mary Shelton's hand, in particular, makes frequent appearances. Sometimes she copies the works of others, as with a sequence of medieval borrowings which may have come from one of the early printed collections of Chaucer's works. Elsewhere it seems that she inserts her own compositions: one poem whose lines contain an acrostic on the letters SHELTON (*Suffryng in sorow in hope to attayn*) ends 'ffynys S / on desyard sarwes / reqwer no hyar / Mary Shelton'; another (*Wel I have at other lost*) is signed with her name. Margaret Douglas writes 'fynis margret' after *Wyth sorowful syghes & wondes smart*, which occurs in a sequence of lyrics which seem to have passed between her and Lord Thomas Howard. Some of the unascribed poems have been attributed, with varying degrees of

plausibility, to other women: a riddle which ends 'A ama yowrs an' has been connected with Anne Boleyn herself.

The Devonshire manuscript is a valuable reminder of the area of unofficial, unpublished female literary accomplishment which we are unlikely to be able to resurrect in other ways. The scholarly translation of devotional works was obviously regarded as legitimate and improving female activity for those with the necessary leisure and resources. To locate other kinds of writing we must often trespass on what was for women, officially at least, forbidden ground. In the manuscript biography of Anne Boleyn compiled by her chaplain William Latimer we find reference to the reproofs which had to be administered to Mary Shelton when it was found that the margins of her prayer book were defaced with 'idle poesies'<sup>80</sup> – perhaps of exactly the kind with which she filled the Devonshire manuscript; and Vives's *Instruction of a Christian Woman* explicitly forbids the copying of 'voyde verses' and 'wanton or tryflyng songes' into the manuscript notebooks and florilegia which young women are recommended to compile.<sup>81</sup> The apparent burgeoning of publicly approved kinds of women's writing in the sixteenth century only reminds us more acutely of the historical and cultural factors which must have obstructed, for several centuries, the recording or the survival of many other sorts of text.

This restatement of what has been lost may sound a gloomy concluding note, but it has nonetheless a positive lesson. Once we can begin to comprehend the circumstances in which women thought and communicated in the Middle Ages we can understand rather better how to locate and define what they had to say. This process may involve the rejection of traditional literary-historical approaches concerned with the establishment of particular canons, and in their place the formulation of new criteria for tracing and assessing the nature of women's involvement in the surviving literature of the period; detailed investigation of the whole area of patronage, for example, seems rich in potential. I have tried to illustrate some of the circumstances which might be considered at the beginning of such a process: our ignorance of women's educational attainments and the methods in which they composed; the difficulties occasioned by anonymous works or misleading scribal information; the confusing literary precedents which inspire 'women's voices' and female narrators; the moral and social factors which dictated what was and was not appropriate female activity. By all these, as by the more recent sentimental feminism which sought to identify a woman's mind behind every expression of strong personal feeling, we may well be confused. But we may perhaps find hope for the recovery of women's writing in the index entry under 'women' in Brown and Robbins's *Index of Middle English Verse*,

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where, after directions to 'abuse of', 'deceit of', 'examples against', 'faithlessness of', 'garrulity of', 'lack of discretion in', 'lecherousness of', 'satire against', 'tyranny of' and 'wiles of' (to select from an alphabetical list) we read 'will have their say'. We must trust that they will.

### NOTES

- \* The subject of this essay was initially suggested by research undertaken in connection with contributions to Virginia Blain, Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy (eds.), *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English* (Batsford: London, 1990); I should like to thank the editors for the opportunities and the help they have offered. Different versions of the essay have been given at the universities of Cambridge, Kent and London, and at the 21st International Congress on Medieval Studies, University of Western Michigan, Kalamazoo. I am grateful to the audiences for their constructive questions and suggestions, as also to the general editor of the present volume, Carol Meale, for invaluable help.

The following additional abbreviations have been used: *IMEV*: Carleton Brown and Russell Hope Robbins, *The Index of Middle English Verse* (New York: Index Society, 1943); *SIMEV*: Russell Hope Robbins and John L. Cutler, *A Supplement to the Index of Middle English Verse* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1965).

- 1 Charity Cannon Willard, 'The Remarkable Case of Clothilde de Surville', *Esprit Créateur* 6 (1966), 108-16.
- 2 As phrased by Mary Jacobus (ed.), *Women Writing and Writing about Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 7. Other works on feminist critical theory which pose the same questions include Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985); Mary Eagleton (ed.), *Feminist Literary Theory: a Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); and Gary F. Waller, 'Struggling into Discourse: the Emergence of Renaissance Women's Writing', in Margaret P. Hannay (ed.), *Silent but for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1985), pp. 238-56. For further relevant theoretical discussion, see Janet Todd, *Feminist Literary History: A Defence* (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1988). Surveys of women and their writing in the period which I have found useful include Derek Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women*, *Studies in Church History: Subsidia* 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978); Carolly Erickson and Kathleen Casey, 'Women in the Middle Ages: A Working Bibliography', *Medieval Studies* 37 (1975), 340-59; Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (†203) to Marguerite Porete (†1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Patricia H. Labalme (ed.), *Beyond their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1980); Rosemary Masek, 'Women in an Age of Transition, 1485-1714', in Barbara Kanner (ed.), *The Women of England, from Anglo-Saxon*

- Times to the Present: Interpretive Bibliographical Essays* (London: Mansell, 1980), pp. 138–82; Retha M. Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation* (Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 1983).
- 3 Nicholas Orme, *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1973). See also his *From Childhood to Chivalry: the Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy, 1066–1530* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984).
  - 4 See the prologue to the *Lais*, ed. Alfred Ewert (Oxford: Blackwell, 1944), p. 1 (line 30), and the epilogue to the *Fables*, ed. A. Ewert and R. C. Johnston (Oxford: Blackwell, 1942), p. 62 (line 12).
  - 5 For further bibliography see Glyn S. Burgess, *Marie de France: an Analytical Bibliography* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1977), and *Supplement I* (1986), and the same author's study of *The 'Lais' of Marie de France: Text and Context* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1987).
  - 6 William MacBain (ed.), *The Life of St Catherine*, ANTS 18 (1964); M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 60–72; Josiah Cox Russell, *Dictionary of Writers of Thirteenth-Century England*, Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research Special Supplement 3 (1936, reprinted with additions and corrections 1967), p. 23. The achievements of 'Muriel: The Earliest English Poetess', described by J. S. P. Tatlock, *PMLA* 48 (1933), 317–21, are resistant to reconstruction. The reputed association of Eleanor of Provence with the romance *Blandin de Cornouailles* (Orme, *Childhood to Chivalry*, p. 162), is now to be discounted; see C. H. M. Van der Horst (ed.), *Blandin de Cornouaille: Introduction, Edition Diplomatique, Glossaire* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1974), p. 62. See also the essay by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne in this volume.
  - 7 M. Wattie (ed.), *The Middle English Lai le Freine*, Smith College Studies in Modern Languages 10 (Northampton, Mass.: Smith College, 1929), and A. J. Bliss (ed.), *Sir Launfal*, 2nd edn. (London & Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1966).
  - 8 John F. Benton, 'Trotula, Women's Problems, and the Professionalization of Medicine in the Middle Ages', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 59 (1985), 30–53, p. 52; Lorryne Y. Baird-Lange, 'Trotula's Fourteenth-Century Reputation, Jankyn's Book, and Chaucer's Trot', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer Proceedings* 1 (1984), 245–56, and Beryl Rowland (ed.), *A Medieval Woman's Guide to Health* (London: Croom Helm, 1981).
  - 9 J. C. Laidlaw, 'Christine de Pizan, the Earl of Salisbury and Henry IV', *French Studies* 36 (1982), 129–43.
  - 10 See further Angus J. Kennedy, *Christine de Pizan: A Bibliographical Guide* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1984) and Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan – Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea Books, 1984).
  - 11 See Thelma S. Fenster and Mary Carpenter Erler (eds.), *Poems of Cupid, God of Love* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), and Curt F. Bühler (ed.), *Stephen Scrope: The Epistle of Othea*, EETS OS 264 (1970), pp. xi–xiii.
  - 12 See Diane Bornstein (ed.), *The Middle English Translation of Christine de Pisan's 'Livre du Corps de Policie'* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1978). For the *Cité* see the facsimile: Diane Bornstein (introd.), *Distaves and Dames: Renaissance Treatises for and about Women* (New York: Delmar, 1978).

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- 14 Sandra Hindman, 'The Composition of the Manuscript of Christine de Pizan's Collected Works in the British Library: a Reassessment', *British Library Journal* 9 (1983), 93-123.
- 15 See Charlotte d'Evelyn, 'Instructions for Religious', in J. Burke Severs (ed.), *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500, II* (New Haven: Conn. Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1970), pp. 458-81, 650-9; Ann M. Hutchison, 'Devotional Reading in the Monastery and in the Late Medieval Household', in Michael G. Sargent (ed.), *De cella in seculum: Religious and Secular Life and Devotion in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), pp. 215-27.
- 16 William Patterson Cumming (ed.), *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta*, EETS OS 178 (1929); Theresa A. Halligan (ed.), 'The Booke of Gostlye Grace' of Mechtilde of Hackeborn, *Studies and Texts* 46 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1979).
- 17 Phyllis Hodgson and Gabriel M. Liegey (eds.), *The Orchard of Syon*, EETS OS 258 (1966).
- 18 Ruth J. Dean, 'Manuscripts of St Elizabeth of Schönau in England', *MLR* 32 (1937), 62-71; Marilyn Doiron (ed.), 'Margaret Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*: A Middle English Translation', *Archivio Italiano per la Storia della Pietà* 5 (1968), 241-355.
- 19 See Hindman, 'Christine de Pizan's Collected Works', figure 2.
- 20 M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979).
- 21 Edmund Colledge OSA and James Walsh SJ (eds.), *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich*, 2 vols. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978), introduction and chapter VIII.
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- 23 Colledge and Walsh (eds.), *Showings*, II, p. 285, and I, p. 222.
- 24 Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen (eds.), *The Book of Margery Kempe*, EETS OS 212 (1940).
- 25 John C. Hirsh, 'Author and Scribe in *The Book of Margery Kempe*', *Medium Aevum* 44 (1975), 145-50.
- 26 Meech and Allen (eds.), *Margery Kempe*, pp. 3-4.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 28 *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 30 *Ibid.*, pp. 78, 206-7, 248.
- 31 See further Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The 'Book' and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983) and John C. Hirsh, *The Revelations of Margery Kempe: Paramystical Practices in Late Medieval England* (Leiden: Brill, 1989).
- 32 Margaret Aston, 'Lollardy and Literacy', *History* 62 (1977), 347-71, and 'Lollard Women Priests?', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31 (1980), 441-61,

- reprinted in *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon 1984), pp. 193–217, 49–70; Claire Cross, “‘Great Reasoners in Scripture’: the Activities of Women Lollards, 1380–1530”, in Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women*, pp. 359–80.
- 33 D. S. Brewer and A. E. B. Owen (introd.), *The Thornton Manuscript: Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91*, 2nd edn. (London: Scholar, 1977), f. 250v. The text is reproduced in C. Horstmann (ed.), *Yorkshire Writers*, 2 vols. (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1895–6), 1, p. 383, and by Marta Powell Harley (ed.), *A Revelation of Purgatory by an Unknown Fifteenth-Century Woman Visionary* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1985). See also Marta Powell Harley, ‘The Origin of *A Revelation of Purgatory*’, *Reading Medieval Studies* 12 (1986), 87–91, and (on a similar text) ‘The Vision of Margaret Edwards and Others at Canterbury, 29 July 1451’, *Manuscripta* 32 (1988), 146–52. I am grateful to Dr John Thompson for information and references.
  - 34 Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries, c. 1275 to 1535*, 2nd edn. (New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1964).
  - 35 Susan Hagen Cavanaugh, ‘A Study of Books Privately Owned in England, 1300–1450’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1980); Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran, *The Growth of English Schooling, 1340–1548: Learning, Literacy, and Laicization in Pre-Reformation York Diocese* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, 2nd edn. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1976). See also Susan Groag Bell, ‘Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture’, *Signs* 7 (1982), 742–68, reprinted in Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (eds.), *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1988), pp. 149–87. For women associated with the book trade, see C. Paul Christianson, *A Directory of London Stationers and Book Artisans 1300–1500* (New York: Bibliographical Society of America, 1990), ‘Index of Persons Named in the Directory’, pp. 183–242, and Frances Hamill, ‘Some Unconventional Women Before 1800: Printers, Booksellers, and Collectors’, *Proceedings of the Bibliographical Society of America* 49 (1955), 300–14.
  - 36 M. Y. Offord (ed.), *The Book of the Knight of the Tower, Translated by William Caxton*, EETS SS 2 (1971), p. 122.
  - 37 Norman Davis (ed.), *The Paston Letters*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, 1976). 1, p. xxxviii.
  - 38 Alison Hanham (ed.), *The Cely Letters, 1472–1488*, EETS OS 273 (1975); Charles Lethbridge Kingsford (ed.), *The Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290–1483*, Camden Society 3rd series 29, 30 (1919); Thomas Stapleton (ed.), *Plumpton Correspondence*, Camden Society 4 (1839). Lady Margaret Hungerford’s ability to write a ‘large, sprawling hand’ is noted by M. A. Hicks, ‘The Piety of Margaret, Lady Hungerford (d. 1478)’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38 (1987), 19–38.
  - 39 Muriel St Clare Byrne (ed.), *The Lisle Letters*, 6 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); cf. the hands of Katherine Parr, Lady Jane Grey, and the Princess Elizabeth: plates 29, 33, 28 in Alfred J. Fairbank, *Renaissance Handwriting: an Anthology of Italic Scripts* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960).



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- 41 The writings of Chaucer and Gower present mainly legendary women, classical or historical, engaged in writing: Dido, Criseyde, Anelida or Canace, for example. See Larry D. Benson (ed.), *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 613 (lines 1354-65), 506 (II, 1218-26), 520 (III, 501-4), 579 (V, 1424-30), 581-2 (V, 1590-1631), 379 (209-352); G. C. Macaulay (ed.), *The English Works of John Gower*, 2 vols., EETS ES 81, 82 (1900, 1901), 1, pp. 233-4 (III, lines 271-306). In a more contemporary setting in Chaucer's Merchant's Tale, May responds to a lover's advances with a letter 'right of hire hand'; see Benson (ed.), *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 163 (IV, lines 1996-2000).
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- 45 See IMEV, index, under 'Children'.
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- 48 See Hands (ed.), *Hawking and Hunting*, pp. lv-lx.
- 49 For a facsimile of the St Albans edition, see William Blades (introd.), *The Boke of Saint Albans* (London: Elliot Stock, 1881), and for de Worde's edition, [Joseph Haslewood] (introd.), *The Boke Containing the Treatises of Hawking: Hunting: Coat-armour: Fishing: and Blasing of Arms [With biographical and bibliographical notices by J. H.]* (London: White and Cochrane; Triphook, 1810).
- 50 The Rev. Walter W. Skeat, *The Chaucer Canon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), p. 110; for the text, see Frank Sidgwick and E. K. Chambers (eds.), *Early English Lyrics* (London: Bullen, 1907), pp. 34-48.
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- 53 The Rev. Walter W. Skeat (ed.), *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894-7), 7, p. xi.
- 54 Bertha Skeat (ed.), *Lamentatyon*, p. 33.
- 55 D. A. Pearsall (ed.), *The Floure and the Leafe and The Assembly of Ladies* (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1962). Alexandra A. T. Barratt, "'The Flower and the Leaf" and "The Assembly of Ladies": Is There a (Sexual) Difference?', *Philological Quarterly* 66 (1987), 1-24, deals most crisply

- with the subject of authorship. See also Ann McMillan, "Fayre Sisters Al": *The Flower and the Leaf* and *The Assembly of Ladies*', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 1 (1982), 27-42.
- 56 The Rev. Walter W. Skeat, 'The Authoress of *The Flower and the Leaf*', *Modern Language Quarterly* 3 (1900), 111-12, and *Athenaeum* 3933 (1903), 340; cf. also his *Chaucer Canon*, pp. 110-11, 139-41.
- 57 K. G. Wilson, "'The Lay of Sorrow" and "The Lufaris Complaynt"', *Speculum* 29 (1954), 708-26. Earlier continental pseudo-Ovidian poems written by women are discussed by Dronke, *Women Writers*, pp. 84-106. On the general question of the influence of the *Heroides*, see Götz Schmitz, *The Fall of Women in Early English Narrative Verse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Martin Camargo, *The Middle English Verse Love Epistle* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1991).
- 58 See John F. Plummer (ed.), *Vox Feminae: Studies in Medieval Woman's Songs*, *Studies in Medieval Culture* 15 (Kalamazoo, 1981); Patricia A. Belanoff, 'Women's Songs, Women's Language: *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*', in Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (eds.), *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990) pp. 193-203; Doris Earnshaw, *The Female Voice in Medieval Romance Lyric* (New York, Bern, Frankfurt and Paris: Lang, 1988). Recent investigations of specific lyrics are John Scattergood, 'Two Unrecorded Poems from Trinity College Dublin MS 490', *Review of English Studies* 38 (1987), 46-9, and Alexandra Barratt, "'I Am Rose" Restored', *Notes and Queries* 235 (1990), 270. I am further indebted to an unpublished paper which Dr Barratt gave to the London Old and Middle English Research Seminar on some of the material to be included in her anthology *Women's Writing in Middle English* (London: Longman, 1992).
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- 61 For example, Greene (ed.), *Carols*, nos. 446, 419 etc. On misogynist lyrics, see Francis Lee Utley, *The Crooked Rib: an Analytical Index to the Argument about Women in English and Scots Literature to the End of the Year 1568* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, 1944), and (more generally) Katharine M. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: a History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1966).
- 62 Meg Bogin (ed.), *The Women Troubadours* (New York: Norton, 1980) and William D. Paden (ed.), *The Voice of the Troubadour: Perspectives on the Women Troubadours* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989); cf. also Alan Deyermond, 'Spain's First Women Writers', in Beth Miller (ed.), *Women in Hispanic Literature* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: California University

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- Press, 1983), pp. 27–52, and Rita Lemaire, 'La lyrique portugaise primitive des *Cantigas de Amigo*', in Birte Carle (ed.), *Aspects of Female Existence* (Copenhagen: Gyldenhal, 1980), pp. 87–114.
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  - 64 Rossell Hope Robbins, 'The Poems of Humfrey Newton, Esquire, 1466–1536', *PMLA* 65 (1950), 249–81, p. 267.
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  - 66 Richard Beadle and A. E. B. Owen (introd.), *The Findern Manuscript: Cambridge University Library MS Ff.1.6* (London: Scolar, 1977); Rossell Hope Robbins, 'The Findern Anthology', *PMLA* 69 (1954), 610–42, and Kate Harris, 'The Origins and Make-Up of Cambridge University Library MS Ff.1.6', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 8 (1983), 299–333.
  - 67 *IMEV* 2279, *My woofull bert*; 3878, *Welcome be ye*; 3917, *What so men seyn*; *SIMEV* 4272.5, *Yit wulde I nat*. All are printed by Robbins, 'The Findern Anthology' (the last in the list is unaccountably presented as spoken by a man).
  - 68 Elizabeth Hanson-Smith, 'A Woman's View of Courtly Love: the Findern Anthology, CUL Ff.1.6', *Journal of Women's Studies in Literature* 1 (1979), 179–94. Two articles which have appeared since the writing of this chapter offer further suggestions about women's involvement in the composition of some of the poems: Peter Dronke, 'On the Continuity of Medieval English Love-Lyric', in Edward Chaney and Peter Mack (eds.), *England and the Continental Renaissance: Essays in Honour of J. B. Trapp* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), pp. 7–21; and Sarah McNamer, 'Female Authors, Provincial Setting. The Re-Versing of Courtly Love in the Findern Manuscript', *Vivator* 22 (1991), 279–310.
  - 69 Carleton Brown (ed.), *Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), pp. 53–4. The lyric is attributed to Lydgate in the sixteenth-century British Library Additional MS 29729, copied by John Stow.
  - 70 J. B. L. Tolhurst (ed.), *The Ordinale and Customary of the Benedictine Nuns of Barking Abbey (University College, Oxford, MS 169)*, 1, Henry Bradshaw Society 65 (1927), 92–112; Nancy Cotton, 'Katherine of Sutton: the First English Woman Playwright', *Educational Theatre Journal* 30 (1978), 475–81.
  - 71 Alexandra Barratt, 'Dame Eleanor Hull: a Fifteenth-Century Translator', in Roger Ellis et al. (eds.), *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), pp. 87–101. For Dame Eleanor's will, see Sir H. C. Maxwell-Lyte and M. C. B. Dawes (eds.), *The Register of Thomas Bekynton, Bishop of Bath and Wells, 1443–65, part I*, Somerset Record Society 49 (1934), 352–3.

- 72 Rose Cords, 'Fünf me. Gedichte aus den Hss. Rawlinson poetry 36 und Rawlinson c.86', *Archiv* 135 (1916), 292-302.
- 73 See Julia Boffey and Carol M. Meale, 'Selecting the Text: Bodleian MS Rawlinson c.86 and Some Other Books for London Readers', in Felicity Riddy (ed.), *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), pp. 143-69.
- 74 Roman Dyboski (ed.), *Songs, Carols, and other Miscellaneous Poems from the Balliol MS 354, Richard Hill's Commonplace Book*, EETS ES 101 (1908), 97-9.
- 75 James Orchard Halliwell (ed.), *The Most Pleasant Song of Lady Bessy*, Percy Society 20: iv (1847); see also David A. Lawton, 'Scottish Field: Alliterative Verse and Stanley Encomium in the Percy Folio', *Leeds Studies in English* new series 10 (1978), 42-53, and Ian Baird, 'Some Missing Lines in *Lady Bessy*', *The Library*, 6th series 5 (1983), 268-9.
- 76 Halliwell (ed.), *Lady Bessy*, pp. 10-11. It is clear from other sources that Elizabeth had no command of Spanish; see Maria Dowling, *Humanism in the Age of Henry VIII* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 17.
- 77 See Charles Henry Cooper, *Memoir of Margaret, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge: Deighton Bell, 1874); Enid M. G. Routh, *Lady Margaret. A Memoir of Lady Margaret Beaufort* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1924); Retha M. Warnicke, 'The Lady Margaret, Countess of Richmond: a Noblewoman of Independent Wealth and Status', *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 9 (1984), 215-48; Malcolm G. Underwood, 'The Lady Margaret and her Cambridge Connections', *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 13 (1982), 67-81, and 'Politics and Piety in the Household of Lady Margaret Beaufort', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38 (1987), 39-52; Michael K. Jones and Malcolm G. Underwood, *The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- 78 Dowling, *Humanism in the Age of Henry VIII*, pp. 219-47.
- 79 Raymond Southall, 'The Devonshire Manuscript Collection of Early Tudor Poetry, 1532-41', *Review of English Studies* new series 15 (1964), 142-50, and E. W. Ives, *Anne Boleyn* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 87-9.
- 80 Maria Dowling, 'Anne Boleyn and Reform', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35 (1984), 30-46, and Retha M. Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn: Family Politics at the Court of Henry VIII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 151.
- 81 Sig. Eij. See the facsimile: Bornstein (introd.), *Distaves and Dames*.

## Women and their poetry in medieval Wales

CERIDWEN LLOYD-MORGAN

Whereas in England and North America much of the pioneering work of listing, identifying and surveying the literature composed by women in the past was undertaken in the 1970s, progress has been far slower in Wales. The possible reasons are many: the slower spread of feminist ideas, perhaps, in the Welsh-speaking community, where traditional gender roles are different from those in other countries of the British Isles, and the under-representation of women (or men interested in women's literature) in the academic establishment. Although the basic research tools were at hand, notably the *Mynegai i farddoniaeth gaeth y llawysgrifau* (a first-line index to poetry in the strict metres preserved in Welsh manuscripts),<sup>1</sup> no attempt was made until the mid 1980s even to list the women poets active before 1800.<sup>2</sup> Research in the field of women's poetry in Welsh is still, therefore, in its infancy. The poetry itself is almost entirely unpublished, there are no proper editions of women's poetry earlier than the works of the eighteenth-century hymnist Ann Griffiths, and only in the last few years have a few examples of criticism appeared. Women's poetry in the medieval and modern periods is still marginalised, as witness the continuing tendency to exclude women poets from anthologies.<sup>3</sup>

A few examples may have crept in by the back door, however. The *Oxford Book of Welsh Verse*, for example, contains a number of *ben benillion* (traditional folk-verses).<sup>4</sup> These anonymous four-line stanzas, often sung, with or without musical accompaniment, perhaps by a harp, flourished in the oral tradition before being written down by antiquarians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and they continued to circulate orally thereafter; they constitute one of the most important genres in Welsh poetry. They express basic human experiences and emotions in simple but telling terms, and it is significant that many of them reflect experiences so gender-specific that we may conclude that they were composed by women, as the following examples suggest:

Mi feddyliais ond priodi  
Na chawn ddim ond dawnsio a chanu;  
Ond beth a ges ar ôl priodi  
Ond siglo'r crud a suo'r babi?<sup>5</sup>

[I thought that in marrying  
I would have nothing but dancing and singing;  
But what did I get after marrying  
But rocking the cradle and hushing the baby?]

Drwg am garu, drwg am beidio,  
Drwg am droi fy nghariad heibio,  
Drwg am godi'r nos i'r ffenest';  
Da yw bod yn eneth onest.

Drwg am garu cudyn crych,  
Drwg am wisgo amdanai'n wych,  
Drwg am fynd i'r llan y Sulie,  
Drwg a gawn pe 'rhoswn gartre.<sup>6</sup>

[Blamed for courting, blamed for not,  
Blamed for throwing over my lover,  
Blamed for getting up at night to the window;  
The right thing to be is a virtuous girl.

Blamed for falling in love with curly hair,  
Blamed for dressing smartly,  
Blamed for going to church on Sundays,  
Blamed I'd be if I stayed at home.]

Much of the published output of women may be hiding behind the 'anonymous' label of poetry of this kind.

Nonetheless, there are women poets whose names and work survive, even if they are a tiny minority of the total extant corpus of Welsh poetry. Out of more than four thousand poets named in the *Mynegai i farddoniaeth gaeth y llawysgrifau*, covering manuscripts from the earliest medieval survivals to the nineteenth century, only some sixty-six names are indisputably female. Even this figure may be too high, for some of the names may represent pseudonyms used by men, and others, such as 'Esyllt' (the Welsh form of Iseult) and 'Gwendydd chwaer Myrddin' [Gwendydd sister of Merlin] are legendary, the poems attributed to them forming part of a narrative context. But once we have listed the apparently genuine names, far greater difficulties appear. It is virtually impossible to discover reliable information about most of them, even those from as late a period as

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the eighteenth century, and as a rule the few facts which can be traced are very scattered, often in unexpected sources. All too often only the poet's name has survived, together with one, or at most two, examples of her work. Usually the poems survive only in a single manuscript or at best two. Only six of the women poets working before 1800 whom I have traced have more than three poems preserved in writing.

The very earliest named woman poet identified so far is Gwenllïan ferch Rhirid Flaidd, and had she not been the daughter of a male poet, as her patronymic reveals, it is unlikely that we could even tell in which century she lived. Since Rhirid Flaidd, her father, was composing around 1160, we may estimate that she was active around 1180–1200. Only one poem is attributed to her, a stanza replying to an uncomplimentary one addressed to her by a man: Gruffudd ap Dafydd ap Gronw, according to Cardiff, Central Library of the South Glamorgan Library Service Hafod MS 26, but her husband according to Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales NLW MS 872D. It is far from certain, however, that this poem is Gwenllïan's work, for it does not occur in the main manuscript collections of poetry by her contemporaries (the Hendregadredd Manuscript and the Red Book of Hergest) and no manuscript copies of it predate the sixteenth century. Nonetheless, in the face of such scarcity of medieval women poets, the case of Gwenllïan ferch Rhirid Flaidd is important as evidence that women were not entirely excluded from the poetic tradition, and even if the one surviving poem may be of uncertain ancestry, its existence suggests that others may have been lost.

This brings us to one of the fundamental problems, or characteristics, of the manuscript tradition of women's poetry in Welsh, namely a long time lapse between the supposed date of composition and the date of the earliest manuscript. This is not peculiar to women's poetry, but from the limited evidence available it does seem to have been even more common a phenomenon in their case than in that of their male counterparts. It is possible either that earlier copies have simply not survived, or that no earlier copies existed. If the latter were the case, then clearly the poetry has been transmitted orally during the intervening period. This is certainly known to have happened as late as the eighteenth century, for Ann Griffiths (1766–1805), author of some of the finest and most theologically sophisticated hymns in the Welsh language, never wrote down her work, although she could write. She composed her hymns orally, often using traditional melodies, and members of her household and fellow Methodists learned them from her; they were not written down until after her death.<sup>7</sup>

The case of Ann Griffiths is in some ways comparable with that of Gwerful Mechain, the most important and prolific woman poet of the

Middle Ages, and indeed the only one active before 1500, apart from the uncertain Gwenllïan ferch Rhirid Flaidd, whose name has survived. Gwerful, who was composing between about 1462 and 1500 in Montgomeryshire, has thirty-eight poems attributed to her in the manuscripts, a far greater number than is attributed to any other woman poet before 1800.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, there are far more manuscript copies of her work than of any other Welshwoman's poetry. None of these copies is contemporary, however, for the earliest was made in the sixteenth century. Whether any of her work was written down in her lifetime is impossible to establish, but it was undoubtedly transmitted orally. There is reliable evidence that some of her poetry was circulating orally well into the nineteenth century,<sup>9</sup> and such manuscripts as survive confirm that the same was true for earlier centuries. Where several manuscript versions of the same poem exist, there are substantial variations in the text, despite the fact that metre, rhyme and *cynghanedd*<sup>10</sup> give far less scope for simple variants or corruption than in the case of prose works, or even poetry in freer metres. At times the variation between texts of the same poem is so great that it can only be assumed that they reflect different oral versions. This does not preclude further variants creeping in later, of course, as successive written copies were made. This poses considerable problems when editing, though the same difficulties arise with the work of other poets, including men. Not only can it prove well-nigh impossible to establish a definitive edition of a single poem; the late date and variability of the manuscript tradition can cause confusion as to attribution.

Some of Gwerful Mechain's poetry was attributed to the great fourteenth-century poet, Dafydd ap Gwilym, and vice versa, whilst poems probably composed by Tudur Aled and Ieuan Deulwyn sometimes bear Gwerful's name. Perhaps the clearest example of the confusion that can arise from the nature of the late manuscript tradition is that of the poems attributed to three sisters composing poetry in the mid sixteenth century. Alis (fl. 1520–70), Catrin and Gwenhwyfar of Llannerch, Llewenni Fechan, Denbigh, were, typically, daughters of a male poet, Gruffudd ab Ieuan ap Llywelyn Fychan (c. 1485–1553). Only one poem, 'Cywydd cymod rhwng dau ddyn meddw' [*cywydd*]<sup>11</sup> to make peace between two drunken men] is attributed to Gwenhwyfar, on the authority of three manuscripts, but the very same poem is attributed to her sister, Alis, in three other manuscripts, where the title, however, is different: 'Cymod rhwng Grugor y Moch a Dafydd Llwyd Lwdwn' [Reconciliation between Grugor y Moch and Dafydd Llwyd Lwdwn]. The work of the third sister, Catrin, is also beset with difficulties, for two manuscripts name her as the author of a series of twenty *englynion*, and a further manuscript attributes an *awdl* to her. But



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these same poems were also attributed in other manuscripts to a different Catrin, Catrin ferch Gruffudd ap Hywel from Llanddaniel-fab in Anglesey. Five other examples of the work of the Anglesey Catrin are known, and it appears that at some point a scribe confused the two Catrins, whose fathers had the same given name, resulting in a similar patronymic, and who were active at approximately the same period.<sup>12</sup> The task of an editor wishing to establish who composed which poems is exacerbated by the small number of copies, and the small number of extant poems attributed to each woman, making it extremely difficult to prove authorship on the basis of style and technique.

That few manuscripts should be produced, especially during the poet's lifetime, and that great reliance should be put on oral transmission, was in fact the normal pattern in the society in which they lived, for the male poets as well as women. Even today the oral dimension remains exceptionally important in Welsh, not only in public performance of poetry, but in poetic contests held in pubs and village halls, in the *eisteddfod* and even on the radio. In the past the process of oral composition seems to have been assisted by the use of well-known tunes as a framework, notably for poems in the free metres. Ann Griffiths's use of traditional airs has already been mentioned, but it is worth noting also that the poems of a number of eighteenth-century women are accompanied in the manuscripts by a note of the appropriate tune. Examples include two poems by the noted poet Angharad James (1677–1749)<sup>13</sup> of Dolwyddelan, Caernarfonshire: one, in National Library of Wales Cwrtmawr MS 463B 'i'w canu ar lefi land' [to be sung to 'Leave land'] and another, according to National Library of Wales NLW MS 9B, 'i'w canu ar y fedle fawr' [to be sung to 'the great medley'].<sup>14</sup> Such notes suggesting a suitable tune are also found in manuscripts of men's poems, both secular and otherwise, but these particular instances are important for our purposes in that they confirm that in Angharad's case examples of her work were performed orally as well as being written down.

In view of the fact that the work of so few women has survived, as compared with that of male poets, it is arguable that the tendency for poems to be composed and transmitted first and foremost orally was even commoner for women's than for men's work, and that the women's poetry tended to subsist longer in the oral medium before being written down, or was more likely to remain in a purely oral dimension, never being committed to writing. There may well have been a long delay before it became the norm for women's poetry to be written down.

If the transmission of women's poetry, then, continued to be confined mainly to the oral medium even at the later period, when men's poems were

regularly being written down, the tradition of women's poetry, as far as actual transmission is concerned, must have been more conservative. The reasons for this can be traced in the position of women in Welsh society. First of all, the social status of women doubtless meant that their poetic output had lower priority than that of men, when parchment or paper was both scarce and expensive. One vast problem, too complex to discuss at length here, is that of access by women to training in the strict metres, still very much a male preserve in the second half of the twentieth century, although there has been some noticeable change within the last decade.

It cannot be coincidental that, with the exception of Gwerful Mechain, most of the women poets up to the seventeenth century whose names survive were either the daughters or wives of male poets. It is not unlikely that their poems and even their names would be unknown to us had they not had these family ties, and we can only guess at the existence of other women whose poems were never set down in writing because they had not the male relatives under whose aegis they might reach a wider audience. And although Gwerful Mechain's reputation as a poet was so high that some scribes in the two centuries following her death even attributed to her poems by Dafydd ap Gwilym – a poet as important in Wales as Chaucer in England or Villon in France – it may still be significant that her name too is linked with that of a male poet, Dafydd Llwyd o Fathafarn, who is said to have been her lover.

Oral composition and transmission might, furthermore, be the only possibility for women poets because of the nature of their circumstances at home. Even women of comparatively high social status carried a heavy burden of domestic duties, leaving little leisure or energy for poetic activity. It is a far cry from the court poet, wandering from household to household in Wales, earning his living by composing poems for well-heeled patrons, to the world of Ann Griffiths, whose hymns are said to have come to her sometimes whilst she was engaged in heavy, rhythmical tasks such as milking or churning, or to that of Angharad James, left a young widow with four children, entertaining her maids as they stopped to rest whilst carrying home the full pails after milking the cows in the distant fields. If the inn and the *llofft stabl* (the loft above the stable where hired farm labourers slept), both places for relaxation after work, became the *loci* for the humbler male poets, the women poets' activities seem to have been localised in the workplace above all: the cowshed, kitchen and dairy, or even, as Angharad James's case suggests, in the open fields. Thus women's poetry could be quite separate from men's from its very inception, being associated with the hours and place of work, and the women poets' audience was often other women.

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This last feature was undoubtedly true of a group of women poets living in north-west Wales in the eighteenth century, belonging to a generation younger than Angharad James, but in contact with her in the later years of her life. Such women as Margaret Davies or Marged Dafydd (c. 1700–78 or 1785) from Coet-gae Du near Trawsfynydd, Margaret Rowlands and Alis ach Wiliam seem to have belonged, as did Angharad James, to a comparatively privileged economic background, and had more leisure not only to compose but also, as references in their surviving work and in Margaret Davies's manuscripts suggest, to travel some distance to socialise with other women and exchange poems.<sup>15</sup> Margaret Davies, the best-documented member of what might be described as an informal *cénacle* of women poets, seems also to have taken advantage of these contacts to collect the poems which are preserved in her manuscripts. Five manuscripts copied entirely in her hand have survived, and she was responsible for portions of three others.<sup>16</sup>

This brings us to the question of who wrote down women's poetry and why. Certainly in the earlier period we are forced to conclude that they were set down in writing by men, since literacy amongst women would be less usual, and we have no evidence of female copyists during the medieval period in Wales. There is no doubt that men were the scribes of a number of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century copies of Gwerful Mechain's work, for some of these were undertaken by well-known, named copyists and collectors. However, Margaret Davies herself is the scribe of the only known copy of one of Gwerful's *englynion*. Naturally, in the Middle Ages and early modern period, when female literacy was more restricted than it was during the eighteenth century, the women who were daughters or wives (or perhaps, like Gwerful Mechain, lovers) of established male poets had an advantage. Such relationships could bring women into contact with the society of other male poets, and so give them access to the long learning process necessary for mastering the strict metres; perhaps later on this might lead to women being allowed occasionally to perform their own poems, which might perhaps be first committed to writing as part of a collection of the work of a group of poets in a particular geographical area.

So far I have not succeeded in identifying any woman scribe before the first half of the eighteenth century, though there may be examples undiscovered. The earliest example I have found hitherto is the poet Angharad James, who copied work by other poets – including Gwerful Mechain – as well as two of her own poems, in her 'Llyfr Coch' [red book], so styled because of the colour of the ink used. The importance of the contribution of her near contemporary, Margaret Davies of Coet-gae Du, cannot be over-emphasised: without her efforts in collecting and writing

down poems by other women, both of her own day and earlier, a significant number of poems, and even the names of the women who composed them, would be completely unknown to us today. The evidence of the poetic and scribal activity of both these women demonstrate that literacy need not be incompatible with a flourishing tradition of oral composition and transmission.

In view of the very limited access by women and their poetry to the written record, even as late as the eighteenth century, we should perhaps marvel that even two names, those of Gwenllïan ferch Rhirid Flaidd and Gwerful Mechain, have survived from before 1500. Although Gwerful was esteemed as a poet in her own day and, as we have seen, left her mark in the oral tradition until very recently, she, more than any other Welsh woman poet, has been the victim of prejudice within the present century, for she has been deliberately and consistently excluded from anthologies, scholarly editions and textbooks. Many twentieth-century critics have dismissed her as no more than an author of 'salacious verse',<sup>17</sup> or as no better than a prostitute,<sup>18</sup> ignoring her status as a poet in the intervening centuries. Although Leslie Harries courageously edited some of her poems in his 1933 MA thesis, along with the work of some of her male contemporaries, Gwerful and her poems were omitted from the published version, and still no complete scholarly edition exists.<sup>19</sup> Very few of her poems have ever appeared in print. Yet Gwerful Mechain is of crucial importance, since she is our earliest example of a woman poet for whom we have a certain and substantial corpus of work. Nonetheless, she should not be regarded purely as a milestone, for her work deserves study for its own sake as literature. Furthermore, it provides valuable evidence as to the nature of women's poetry in the late medieval period, and is virtually unique in pre-modern Welsh in voicing an indubitably female viewpoint.

Comparatively little is known about Gwerful Mechain herself. In National Library of Wales NLW MS 3057D, copied before 1563, she is referred to as 'gwerfyll vz hoell vychan o vechan ymowys' [Gwerful daughter of Hywel Fychan of Mechain in Powys]. This is confirmed by the poet Dafydd Llwyd o Fathafarn in his *cwydd*, 'Claf wyf eisiau cael y ferch' [I am sick from wanting the girl], where he sends Llywelyn ap Gutun as a *llatai* [poetic messenger] to Gwerful, whom he describes as 'Gweirul ferch ragorol fain / Hywel Fychan, haul Fechain' [Gwerful, excellent, slim daughter of Hywel Fychan, the sun of Mechain]. The pedigrees confirm her father's name as Hywel Fychan ap Hywel from Llanfechain in Montgomeryshire; he was related to the Fychan family [*anglice* Vaughan] of Llwydiarth.<sup>20</sup> By his wife, Gwenhwyfar, Hywel had at least three sons, Dafydd, Madog and Thomas, and as well as Gwerful another daughter,

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Mawd. Gwerful married John ap Llywelyn Fychan ap Llywelyn ap Deio, and the pedigrees in MSS Peniarth 138 and 135 agree that she had a daughter, Mawd or Malld, named after her own sister, apparently, but it is not known whether she had other children.

There can be no doubt, however, that Gwerful came from Powys,<sup>21</sup> for the evidence of the pedigrees is confirmed by references to places in Montgomeryshire and the border, not only in her own work but also in that of other poets who knew her. An *englyn* by Gwerful describes her travelling home from the *gŷyl mabsant* [church patron saint's festival] in Llansilin,<sup>22</sup> for example, whilst a note in National Library of Wales Peniarth MS 198E states that Dafydd Llwyd met 'Gwerful o Aber Tanat yn ferchog ar geffyl Llymsi yn mynd drwy Afon Danat' [Gwerful from Abertanat riding on a barebacked horse going through the river Tanat].

It has sometimes been suggested that there were two women poets named Gwerful, and that Gwerful Mechain was not the author of the well-known 'Cywydd i ofyn telynrawn' [*cywydd* to ask for a harp strung with horsehair], where the poet depicts herself as innkeeper of 'y Fferi'.<sup>23</sup> The origin of this hypothesis seems to lie in the reference in London, British Library Additional MS 14875 to the poet as 'dyvarnwraig o dal y sarn' [woman innkeeper of Tal-y-sarn], and Enid Roberts has argued that the author of this poem must have been from Pen-y-sarn in Ardudwy, and lived at least a century later than the Montgomeryshire Gwerful.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, the 'Cywydd i ofyn telynrawn' was accepted as part of the canon of the latter's work by Leslie Harries in the nearest we have to any kind of an edition of Gwerful Mechain's poetry. It may be that some difficulty was felt about the daughter of a gentry family such as hers portraying herself as an innkeeper, but one cannot necessarily assume that poets' references to their personal circumstances are reliable biographical evidence. The whole tenor of this *cywydd*, where the woman takes on the masculine role of the patron of poets, is teasing and ironic, and it is possible that a deliberate contrast was intended between the true social status of the poet (which would be known to her audience) and the humbler, less reputable, profession of innkeeper. Certainly the way in which the author of this *cywydd* turns conventions upside down is totally consistent with the style of other poems which can be safely attributed to the Gwerful Mechain of the pedigrees.

There is still more uncertainty as to the exact dates of her life. Leslie Harries suggests that she was born c. 1460–3 and died around 1500,<sup>25</sup> and her own poems and the work of others reveal that she was a contemporary of the poets Dafydd Llwyd o Fathafarn, Llywelyn ap Gutun and Ieuan Dyfi. According to a strong tradition, she and Dafydd Llwyd o Fathafarn

were lovers, but it is not known whether this was before or after her marriage to John ap Llywelyn Fychan. The tradition is reflected in an erotic *ymryson* [dialogue poem] between Gwerful and Dafydd, preserved in National Library of Wales NLW MS 1553A, and in another *ymryson* between Dafydd Llwyd and Llywelyn ap Gutun.<sup>26</sup> In the latter, Dafydd sends Llywelyn as his *llatai* [poetic messenger] to Gwerful Mechain, and Llywelyn in his reply states that he is the same age as Gwerful [‘unoed wyf a’ m gwen deg’], whilst Dafydd is portrayed as a much older man: ‘oll yn llwyd megys Llyn Lliw’ [all hoary/grey (*llwyd* being also a play on the poet’s epithet) like Llyn Lliw], ‘Hŷn yw’r gŵr hwn no’r garreg’ [this man is older than stone], and ‘Celffaint o henaint yw’ [he is a withered stump of old age]. Instead of obediently carrying out his job as a *llatai*, Llywelyn suggests that he intends to take her under the green leaves himself, presenting himself as a better lover. It is thought that Dafydd Llwyd lived from about 1420 to 1490, and that Llywelyn ap Gutun was active as a poet around 1480. Llywelyn was, therefore, considerably younger than Dafydd, and if Gwerful was born around 1460–5 this would confirm the evidence of the *ymryson* that she was of an age with Llywelyn. New evidence has recently come to light as to the date of Ieuan Dyfi’s *cynydd* to Anni Goch, to which Gwerful Mechain replied, and this tends to confirm these datings.<sup>27</sup>

The lack of written evidence to confirm the numerous traditions about Gwerful Mechain is a major difficulty in attempting to piece together a picture of her life. As with the later women poets, oral tradition seems to have been of crucial importance, perhaps more so than the written tradition, and this may well be reflected in the very late date of so many manuscripts containing her work. Although a few of her poems are preserved in sixteenth-century manuscripts (e.g. her ‘Cywydd i ateb Ieuan Dyfi’ [*cynydd* in reply to Ieuan Dyfi] in National Library of Wales Peniarth MS 99), in many cases her poems survive only in single late copies. Examples include a number of her *englynion*, such as one to her father, in an eighteenth-century manuscript, National Library of Wales NLW MS 436B, or that beginning ‘Ni wnn or byd hwn . . .’, in National Library of Wales Minor Deposit MS 56B (formerly Swansea 2: see Plate 2), copied by Margaret Davies around 1738.

The short, compact form of the *englyn*, being easily memorable, would lend itself well to oral transmission, unlike the lengthy *cynydd* form, which was more likely to be written down at some stage. Yet even with the *cynyddau*, in the cases where a number of manuscript copies survive, as in her *cynydd* to Jesus (‘Y gŵr addfwyn gwiw a rodded . . .’), variant readings are legion, causing severe editorial problems. Sometimes the manuscripts

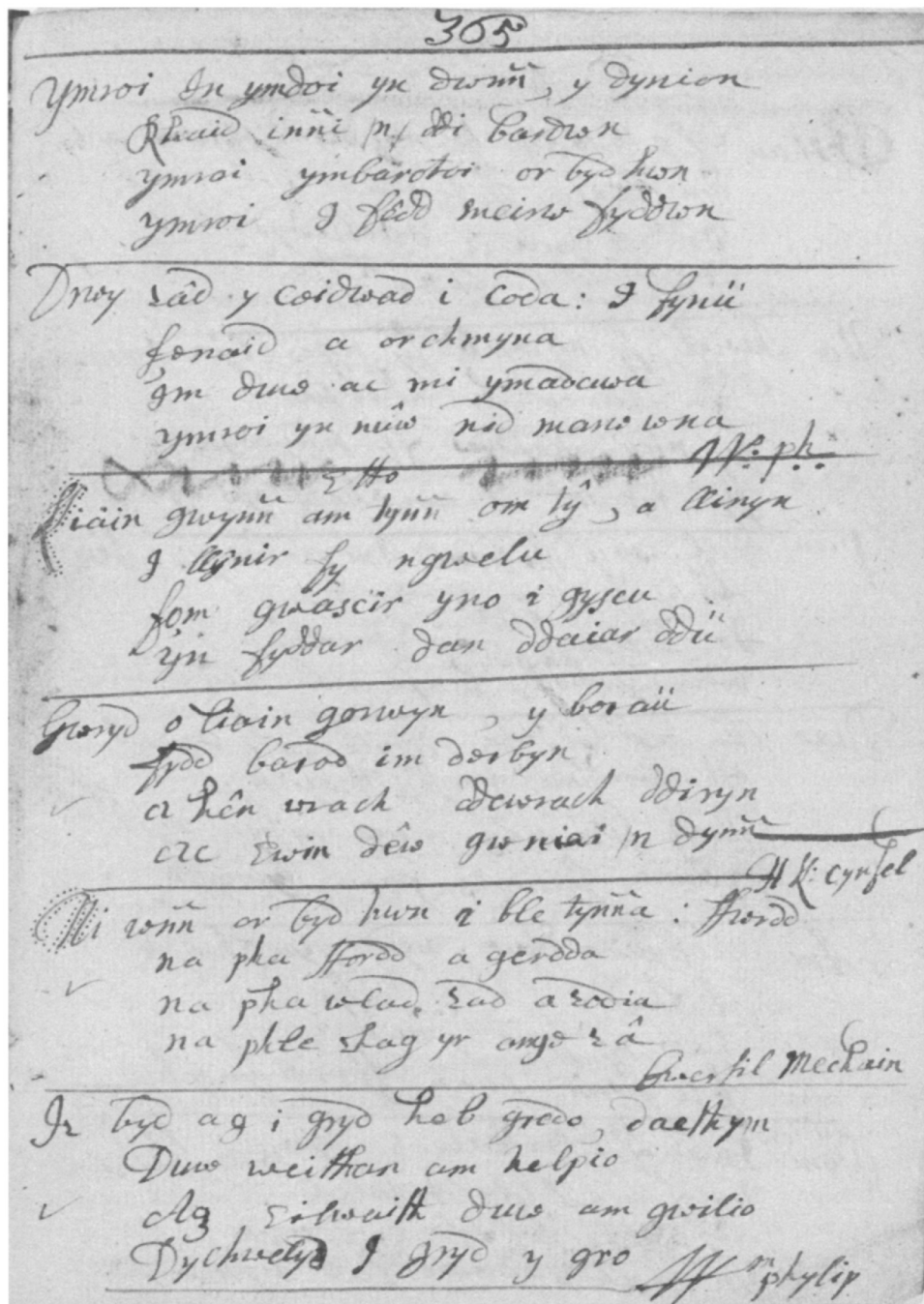


PLATE 2. Folio containing an *englyn* by Gwerful Mechain copied by Margaret Davies

contain extremely corrupt readings which either obscure the meaning or break the rules of rhyme, metre and *cynghanedd*.

If Gwerful Mechain's poems were in many cases not committed to writing until after her death, and subsisted mainly in the oral medium, this might also explain why some of her work was attributed to other, male, poets and vice versa. The notorious 'Cywydd y gal' [the *cynydd* of the penis] was attributed to Gwerful Mechain as well as to Dafydd ap Gwilym, whom Dafydd Johnston has finally shown to be its author,<sup>28</sup> whilst some manuscripts name Gwerful as the author of 'Cywydd y march glas buan' and another *cynydd* to Christ ('Y gŵr a gaiff gyrru gwin . . .'), although Tudur Aled is the more likely author of the former and Ieuan Deulwyn of the latter.<sup>29</sup> One *cynydd* ('Y gŵr a roes ei wryd . . .') is attributed to no less than five men as well as to Gwerful. It is also possible that other poems of her making have not survived, having disappeared from memory before a written record was made of them. Accident or scribal whim alone may be the only reason for the preservation of some of Gwerful's lighter *englynion*, such as her *englyn* to her maid whilst shitting ('Crwciodd lle dihangodd y dwr . . .').<sup>30</sup> This *englyn* is preserved only in Llyfr Brith Corsygedol, Peniarth MS 198E, which was copied between 1693 and 1701, and one can only speculate how many other light, throwaway poems like this one, scatological or otherwise, have disappeared.

One of the most striking features of Gwerful Mechain's surviving *œuvre* is the wide range of themes she chose. Some of them are, of course, familiar enough in the poetry of her male contemporaries, but it is interesting to note that we find in her work no trace of two of the most basic categories of men's poetry throughout the Middle Ages, namely praise poetry and the related elegy. Instead Gwerful turns to new, female topics, as we shall see. As a married woman of some status, Gwerful would naturally not have to rely on a patron for her living, unlike so many of her male counterparts, for her husband, and before him her father, would be responsible for her keep. Not being dependent on a patron or patrons may well have given her greater freedom to choose subjects for her poetry and to treat those subjects as she herself wished.

Like many of her contemporaries she turned often to religious themes, in her *englynion* about the Day of Judgement,<sup>31</sup> for example, to Elen discovering the True Cross,<sup>32</sup> to God and the Trinity,<sup>33</sup> as well as in her *cynydd* to Jesus ('Y gŵr addfwyn gwiw a rodde . . .'), whose popularity is attested by the staggering number of surviving manuscripts copied over a long period.<sup>34</sup> In this *cynydd* Gwerful stresses the sufferings of Christ the Redeemer on the cross in order to save all mankind and bring God's pardon to sinners and spare them Purgatory. The same theme, and again an



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insistence on the Trinity, is found in a sequence of *englynion* published in the *Cefn Coch Manuscripts*.<sup>35</sup> Here she stresses the duty of the Christian to prepare for his or her death: 'Rhaid o bod yn barod / a bore a'r nos . . .' [It is necessary to be ready, both morning and night], but expresses also the fear of death from whom none shall escape:

Ni wn o'r byd hwn i b'le tynna i ffwrdd,  
na pha ffordd a gerdda;  
Na pha wlad rad a rodia,  
Na pha le rhag angau'r a.<sup>36</sup>

[I know not whither I may withdraw from this world,  
nor which way I should walk;  
Nor in what blessed land I might roam,  
Now where I might go to avoid death.]

A similarly intense note is struck in her *canu brud* or prophetic verse. Since tradition connects her with Dafydd Llwyd o Fathafarn, perhaps the most important and certainly the most prolific fifteenth-century exponent of this type of verse,<sup>37</sup> it need not surprise us to find examples within Gwerful's *œuvre*, nor that her series of *englynion brud* [*englynion* on prophetic themes] in National Library of Wales Llanstephan MS 173B and National Library of Wales NLW MS 7191B were composed in the form of an *ymryson* with Dafydd Llwyd himself. The *ymryson* was often used by Dafydd and Gwerful, for a variety of subjects. Besides the *canu brud*, they used the *ymryson* form for satire and for love poetry; another example is the *ymryson* inspired, according to Peniarth 198E, by Dafydd's meeting with Gwerful when she was crossing the river Tanat on horseback. In having frequent recourse to this form Gwerful was following contemporary practice, for it was popular with other poets too, as the *ymryson* between Dafydd Llwyd and Llywelyn ap Gutun on the subject of Gwerful shows, as also do examples in the work of many of their contemporaries.

Although in some ways Gwerful Mechain was, therefore, conforming to mainstream – that is, male – tradition as far as form and themes were concerned, much of her work stands quite apart from that tradition because it expresses a specifically female viewpoint. Sometimes she gives a small twist to an otherwise conventional subject, revealing that she is a woman poet. In the *englyn* about her battling against bad weather whilst journeying home from the festival in Llansilin, for example, she reminds us by her choice of words: 'Fy *mhais* a wlychais yn wlych, fy nghrys / fy *nghwrsi sidangrych*' [My petticoat sopping wet, (likewise) my chemise, my ruffled silk kerchief]. A similar personal or pretended personal note is struck in her

*englynion* to the snow on the same theme, albeit without such overtly female details.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps the most significant poems, however, precisely because nothing else like them has survived in Welsh from the medieval period, are those where she expresses a specifically female response to experiences which are peculiar to women. The clearest examples are two of her *englynion*. In 'Dager drwy goler dy galon',<sup>39</sup> she spits out her pain and fury at being beaten by her husband, and imagines herself paying him back in kind, whilst in 'Gwelais eich lodes lwydwen ddiledd'<sup>40</sup> she takes on the persona of a young woman whose widowed father intends to marry again, and has chosen a bride younger than his daughter. Gwerful hints that such a young girl might prefer something better, and there is more than a touch of scorn in the last line: 'Chwithau, 'Nhad, aethoch yn hen' [You, my father, have become old]. The poet's sympathies are with the young girl, given in marriage to an elderly widower, and there is a suggestion too that the daughter might not welcome a stepmother younger than herself. The theme of 'May and January' is common in other literatures, of course, and we need not assume that Gwerful is referring to events in her own life; there is no evidence in the pedigrees that her father, Hywel Fychan, had remarried, although his wife was twice married. But Gwerful here is expressing sympathy with what must have been a common enough experience for women in her day. It is worth noting, too, that this theme remained popular, for it appears in the work of women poets at a later date. In the sixteenth century, for example, a very similar *englyn* is attributed to Alis ferch Gruffudd ab Ieuan ap Llywelyn Fychan, an *englyn* which may, perhaps, have been influenced by Gwerful.

It is, of course, a woman's feelings which Gwerful Mechain expresses in her love poems. In one *englyn* she yearns for a young man, her own lover, perhaps, or any passionate youth:

Rhown fil o ferched, rhown fwyn lances  
lle ceisiais i orllwyn;  
Rhown gwyn mawr, rhown gan morwyn  
Am un llanc ym min y llwyn.<sup>41</sup>

[I'd give a thousand women, I'd give a gentle girl  
where I sought an ambush;  
I'd give a great lament, I'd give a hundred maids  
For one youth at the edge of the grove.]

A similar theme appears in the anonymous sequence of *englynion* of 'y tair ewig o sir Ddinbych' [the three hinds from Denbighshire] recorded by John Jones of Gellilyfdy in National Library of Wales NLW MS 3039B

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(formerly Mostyn 131) between 1605 and 1618, indicating once more the continuation of one of Gwerful's themes, as well as providing another example of women expressing unambiguously their desire for physical love. The same uninhibited discussion of feelings is found in the erotic *ymryson* of Gwerful Mechain with Dafydd Llwyd o Fathafarn,<sup>42</sup> although in that context she describes her sexual desire in still more explicit terms. Here, undoubtedly, lies the chief obstacle which has prevented so many Welsh scholars and critics in the present century from editing her work or even looking closely at it. It may be that it was not only her sexual frankness that has proved so disturbing but the fact that Gwerful's poetry presents us with a *woman* cheerfully expressing lust. Some unease was doubtless also caused by her vocabulary, no worse than that of many male poets of the period, but still unacceptable to many in the mouth of a woman. Her practice of calling parts of the body by their proper names rather than resorting to euphemism is exemplified not only in her erotic dialogue with Dafydd Llwyd but also in her 'Cywydd y cedor' [loosely translatable as 'the *cywydd* of the cunt'].<sup>43</sup> Here, in a poem which may be a conscious female response to Dafydd ap Gwilym's 'Cywydd y gal', Gwerful Mechain suggests that certain parts of the female body have been left unsung by male poets, but that they merit the same praise as a woman's hair, eyebrows and so on.

However, Gwerful adopts a more serious, indeed learned tone in what is perhaps her most 'feminist' poem (to use the modern term): her 'Cywydd i ateb Ieuan Dyfi am gywydd Anni Goch' [*cywydd* in reply to Ieuan Dyfi for his *cywydd* to Anni Goch]. As Marged Haycock has shown in her edition and discussion of the poem,<sup>44</sup> this is the earliest extended poetic treatment in Welsh of the common medieval theme of the 'querelle des femmes'. The starting point was one of the five *cywyddau* which Ieuan Dyfi addressed to Anni Goch, his wife or mistress: recent research by Llinos Beverley Smith in the records of Hereford Consistory Court has revealed that she was alleged to have been sold to Ieuan Dyfi by her first husband.<sup>45</sup> In the *cywydd* in question Ieuan complains that Anni's love for him has cooled, leaving him in turmoil of mixed feelings of love and hate. He comforts himself that he is not the only man who has suffered because of a woman; indeed, greater men than he have been deceived. Naturally this provides a pretext for expressing general anti-feminist remarks. Much of Ieuan Dyfi's poem is taken up with a long series of *exempla* of perfidious women who were the undoing of heroes, and in her riposte Gwerful proves herself more than capable of giving blow for blow. She in turn provides some thirteen instances of virtuous and heroic women, taken from a variety of sources. Some are from the Bible or Classical texts, others from Welsh sources such

as *Brut y Brenhinedd*, the Welsh versions of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. But, as Marged Haycock has stressed, Gwerful Mechain does not confine herself to these learned *exempla* to prove her point, for she concludes with some apposite personal criticisms of Ieuan Dyfi's accusations against Anni Goch, and, by implication, of men's behaviour to women in general.

Gwerful Mechain's confident and compelling response to Ieuan Dyfi provides ample evidence of her skill, learning and sheer panache as a poet. To write her off as little more than a second-rate author of dubious erotica is to ignore a poet who had the ability, training and versatility to turn her hand to a great variety of themes and topics. The tone varies from light-hearted to *angst*-ridden, from biting satire and anger to gentle fun-poking, from the passionate to the devotional. As our only medieval example of an undoubtedly authentic woman's voice, and above all as a poet, she is more than worthy of a place in the Welsh Parnassus.

NOTES

- 1 Thirteen typescript volumes produced by the Board of Celtic Studies in 1978. Copies are held at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, and in the libraries of the constituent colleges of the University of Wales.
- 2 The only survey so far is that in Kathryn Curtis, Marged Haycock, Elin ap Hywel and Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Beirdd benywaidd yng Nghymru cyn 1800', *Y Traethodydd* 141 (January 1986), 12-27.
- 3 E.g. Tony Conran (ed. and trans.), *Welsh Verse* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1986), esp. pp. 17-18.
- 4 Thomas Parry (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 273-7; for a comprehensive collection see T. H. Parry-Williams (ed.), *Hen benillion* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, repr. 1975).
- 5 Parry-Williams, *Hen benillion*, p. 127.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 38. All translations in the text and notes are my own.
- 7 A. M. Allchin, *Ann Griffiths*, 'Writers of Wales' Series (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), pp. 14-15. For discussion of the role of oral tradition in women's poetry see Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Y fuddai a'r ysgrifbin: y traddodiad llafar a'r beirdd benywaidd', *Barn* 313 (February 1989), 14-16.
- 8 For a survey of Gwerful Mechain's life and work see Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, "'Gwerful, ferch ragorol fain": golwg newydd ar Gwerful Mechain', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* 16 (1990), 84-96. For an incomplete and somewhat tentative edition of her poetry see Leslie A. Harries, 'Barddoniaeth Huw Cae Llwyd ac eraill' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Wales, 1933), pp. 23-6, 123-44.
- 9 O. M. Edwards, *Cartrefi Cymru* (Wrexham: Hughes a'i fab, 1896), pp. 85-6.
- 10 A complex system of ornamentation involving alliteration, assonance and rhyme, and a fundamental feature of Welsh poetry in the strict metres. See Meic

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- Stephens (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), under *cynghanedd*, and Thomas Parry (trans. H. Idris Bell), *A History of Welsh Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), pp. 121–6.
- 11 The *cwydd* (pl. *cwyddau*) is a poem of variable length, but often of twenty to sixty lines or more, whilst the *englyn* is a four-line stanza. See entries in *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales*, and Parry, *A History of Welsh Literature*, pp. 136–48.
  - 12 Curtis *et al.*, 'Beirdd benywaidd', p. 17.
  - 13 On whom see Owen Thomas, *Cofiant John Jones, Talsarn* (Wrexham: Hughes a'i fab, 1874), pp. 24–5; Curtis *et al.*, 'Beirdd benywaidd', pp. 20–3; Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'Oral Composition and Written Transmission. Welsh Women's Poetry from the Middle Ages and Beyond', *Trivium*, 26 (1991), 89–102. Angharad is still remembered in oral tradition in Dolwyddelan: see Eigr Lewis Roberts, *Seren Wib* (Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1986), p. 43, and W. J. Edwards, 'Elias Garmon Owen', *Y Faner*, 19 December 1986, p. 8.
  - 14 On these two tunes and others used for a variety of songs and poems see Phyllis Kinney, 'The Tunes of Welsh Christmas Carols', *Canu Gwerin* 11 (1988), 28–55 and 12 (1989), 5–29.
  - 15 Curtis *et al.*, 'Beirdd benywaidd', pp. 19–20, 23–4; Lloyd-Morgan, 'Y fuddai a'r ysgrifbin', pp. 15–16.
  - 16 On Margaret Davies and her manuscripts see G. J. Williams, *Llythyrau at Ddafydd Jones o Drefriw* (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1943), pp. 39–43; Lewis Morris, writing in the 1740s, includes her in his list of owners of collections of Welsh manuscripts, in National Library of Wales NLW MS 604D, p. 83.
  - 17 *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales*, under Gwerful Mechain.
  - 18 Harries, 'Barddoniaeth Huw Cae Llwyd ac eraill', p. 26.
  - 19 *Gwaith Huw Cae Llwyd ac eraill* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1953); Dr Marged Haycock and myself have recently begun editing the poems.
  - 20 Peter C. Bartrum, *Welsh Genealogies AD 1400–1500* (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1983), 7, lineage of Idnerth Benfras 3(A); this pedigree is based on National Library of Wales Peniarth MSS 128, f. 187 (pre-1582), 138, p. 263 (c. 1562), and 135, p. 148 (in the hand of Gruffudd Hiraethog who died in 1564).
  - 21 Powys here refers, of course, to the medieval territorial division, not to the post-1974 administrative county, which embraces other medieval kingdoms as well.
  - 22 National Library of Wales NLW MS 3039B (formerly Mostyn 131), p. 801, copied by John Jones of Gellilyfdy in the early seventeenth century. For a transcript and further references see Curtis *et al.*, 'Beirdd benywaidd', p. 26, n. 17; this *englyn* was not included by Harries in his thesis.
  - 23 Harries, 'Barddoniaeth Huw Cae Llwyd ac eraill', p. 124; cf. his comments, p. 24, and Lloyd-Morgan, "'Gwerful, ferch ragorol fain'", p. 89 n. 17. The first few lines of this poem are given in English translation in Gwyn Jones (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse in English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 66.

- 24 Enid Roberts, *Dafydd Llwyd o Fathafarn*, Darlith lenyddol Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Maldwyn a'i chyffiniau, 1981 (Caernarfon: Argraffwyr Gwynedd, 1981), p. 12.
- 25 Harries, *Gwaith Huw Cae Llwyd ac eraill*, pp. 30–1, and his entry on Gwerful Mechain in *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940* (London: The Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, 1959).
- 26 W. Leslie Richards (ed.), *Gwaith Dafydd Llwyd o Fathafarn* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1964), pp. 144–50, 178. For modernised text and translation, see Dafydd Johnston (ed. and trans.), *Canu maswedd yr Oesoedd Canol | Medieval Welsh Erotic Poetry* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), pp. 44–5.
- 27 See below, p. 197; discussed by Dr Llinos Beverley Smith in an article to appear in *Ysgrifau Beirniadol*.
- 28 David (Dafydd) Johnston, 'Cywydd y gal by Dafydd ap Gwilym', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 9 (1985), 71–89; see also Johnston, *Canu maswedd*, pp. 28–31.
- 29 For full references see *Mynegai i farddoniaeth gaeth y llawysgrifau*.
- 30 Not included by Harries.
- 31 Harries, 'Barddoniaeth Huw Cae Llwyd ac eraill', p. 143.
- 32 Not included by Harries; copies are preserved in National Library of Wales NLW MS 3039B, p. 404, and Bangor, University College of North Wales Gwynedd MS 3, p. 86 amongst others; for the latter see Ifor Williams (ed.), *Gwyneddion 3* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1931), p. 131.
- 33 Not included by Harries; see NLW MS 3039B, p. 405.
- 34 Harries, 'Barddoniaeth Huw Cae Llwyd ac eraill', pp. 135–6.
- 35 J. Fisher (ed.), *The Cefn Coch Manuscripts* (Liverpool: Foulkes, 1899), pp. 321–3; cf. Harries, 'Barddoniaeth Huw Cae Llwyd ac eraill', pp. 139–42. A copy of the first *englyn* of the series is found in National Library of Wales Cwrtmawr MS 25A, p. 21, in addition to the manuscripts noted by Harries.
- 36 National Library of Wales Minor Deposit 56B (formerly Swansea 2), p. 365. Not included by Harries.
- 37 Richards, *Gwaith Dafydd Llwyd o Fathafarn*; R. Wallis Evans, 'Prophetic Poetry', in A. O. H. Jarman and Gwilym Rees Hughes (eds.), *A Guide to Welsh Literature*, 2 (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1979), pp. 278–97 and references there given.
- 38 Cwrtmawr MS 24B, p. 12; cf. National Library of Wales Llanstephan MS 165, f. 141b, and Harries, 'Barddoniaeth Huw Cae Llwyd ac eraill', p. 137. For an English translation see *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse in English*, p. 66.
- 39 Harries, 'Barddoniaeth Huw Cae Llwyd ac eraill', p. 125; Curtis *et al.*, 'Beirdd benywaidd', p. 17.
- 40 Harries, 'Barddoniaeth Huw Cae Llwyd ac eraill', p. 138.
- 41 NLW MS 1553A, p. 694; not included by Harries. The last line may be deliberately ambiguous, for *min* can mean 'lips' as well as 'edge' and *llwyn* 'pubic hair' as well as 'grove' or 'thicket'.
- 42 Richards, *Gwaith Dafydd Llwyd o Fathafarn*, p. 178.

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- 43 Harries, 'Barddoniaeth Huw Cae Llwyd ac eraill', p. 126; see also Johnston, *Canu maswedd*, pp. 40–3.
- 44 Marged Haycock, 'Merched drwg a merched da: Ieuan Dyfi v. Gwerful Mechain', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol* 16 (1990), 97–110.
- 45 See n. 27 above.

## Further reading

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The intention informing this bibliography is twofold: firstly to allow readers coming to the subject for the first time access to general works, contextual studies, and ‘overviews’ which fell outside the boundaries of the more specialised citations made in the footnotes to the individual chapters in the hardback edition of this book; and secondly, to offer a means of up-dating of the bibliographies directly relating to the essays in the original volume. In an effort to satisfy both these aims the listing begins with a section on ‘General reading’ which covers a broad range of topics, ranging from art, to literature, and to social and religious history. The sections which follow have allowed the contributors to the volume to cite original sources and editions, as well as critical and historical studies, which were not then available, but which have subsequently proved significant both to their own work, and to current critical trends. The element of selectivity is inevitable and references to essays and books are, by and large, concentrated on texts and issues raised by the authors themselves (this is especially so, for example, where the writings of Chaucer and the female mystics are concerned, fields of research in which publications have proliferated in recent years). Brief annotation is provided where it is considered appropriate. Cross-referencing within these latter sections is designed to ease the search for the reader requiring particular kinds of information on texts and/or themes. Citations from the notes are not, however, repeated, therefore any user of the book wanting references to specific studies of a particular text or texts, or topics, should still begin by consulting this source. All authors noted within the essays which constitute the book as a whole are mentioned by page and note number in the Index, whereas this bibliography is designed to be self-contained, and should be used independently of the Index.

The divisions within which the material is arranged are as follows:

- I. General reading (including art history, history and literature)



## Further reading

- II. Bibliographies and concordances
- III. Collections of documentary sources
- IV. Hagiography and religion:
  - (a) *Editions and translations*
  - (b) *Anthologies*
  - (c) *Critical/historical studies*
    - (i) *Collections of essays*
    - (ii) *Individual articles and books*
- V. Secular writing:
  - (a) *Editions and translations*
  - (b) *Anthologies*
  - (c) *Critical/historical studies*
    - (i) *Collections of essays*
    - (ii) *Individual articles and books*

## I. GENERAL READING

- 1 Aers, David, *Community, Gender and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360–1430* (London: Routledge, 1988) [includes a chapter on Margery Kempe].
- 2 Anderson, Bonnie S. and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Their Own: Women in History from Prehistory to the Present*, vol.1 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990 [1988]).
- 3 Ashley, Kathleen and Pamela Sheingorn (eds), *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1990).
- 4 Atkinson, Clarissa W., *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991).
- 5 Barron, Caroline M. and Anne F. Sutton (eds), *Medieval London Widows, 1300–1500* (London: Hambledon, 1994) [includes discussion of women from all social strata, and vowesses].
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